### learn to live

**Summary**

Sans finds himself in a weird alternate timeline where things are swappwed around, but it isn't like he's never jumped timelines before. When he finds his blueberry counterpart he decides to have a little fun before he gets sent back to his own personal hellhole, but it doesn't last long.

Sans is stranded in another timeline with the underswap bros and one determined little fucker who thinks he can 'be better' or some shit. Underfell Sans's 'redemption arc' from being a fucking asshole.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

WARNING: Very VERY blatant rape/noncon scene in the first chapter

(inspired by a gif by fucken-crybaby on tumblr, can't believe i forgot to put this before, rip...)

COVER BY BLOODYARCHIMEDES

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Whatever timeline shenanigans took place to land Sans where he was, he didn’t really care. His own house looked like somebody threw up happiness on it, and it made his stomach twist.

“Anybody home?” he called as he began to walk up the steps. They weren’t as clean as his Papyrus
liked to keep them- but they were still pretty tidy. He was considering this when a shot of blue came from around the top of the steps just as he was stepping off and collided with him.

“Oof! Ouchies!”

It took Sans a second to realize that the brat on the floor in front of him was supposed to be him. The soft-looking Sans on the floor was wearing some kind of scarf and outfit that looked like a seven year old made it. Sans grimaced in disgust, but the blueberry in front of him was already back on his feet.

“Oh! You’re another me!” he chirped all too happily. Sans glared at the worthless excuse for a monster for a second, but the idiot didn’t seem to mind. He practically had stars in his eyes as he looked over Sans’s leather jacket and sharpened teeth.

“Wowza, you look cool,” the not-Sans said, but the taller Sans was already tiring of the timeline. He didn’t know why he was there or what he was supposed to do. He grabbed the other him by the wrist and dragged him back into Papyrus’s bedroom, ignoring the yelp of pain and protest.

Stupid fucking timelines and their stupid fucking bullshit, he didn’t even care anymore. He was going to have some fucking fun and the protests of the pansy-Sans weren’t going to stop him. Why did this little bitch deserve to be happy but he didn’t?

He’d make sure they were both miserable.

It was easy to tie up his counterpart, because unlike himself, the little brat hadn’t trained to make use of his single HP. All Sans had to do was threaten to claw him or bite him and the little bitch did what he was told. He doubted the Papyrus in this timeline was much of a threat given that the Sans was a fucking disgrace, but he taped the short skeleton’s mouth shut anyways.

“I like you more when you aren’t yapping,” Sans commented. The fear in the smaller Sans’s eyes edged him on. The little monster was already on the floor with his hands tied securely behind his back, so all Sans had to do was flip him over so his ass was in the air.

To give him credit, the blueberry did try to struggle free. He cried into the tape and jerked his arms around, and Sans watched in contentment for a moment. He liked to take advantage of the smaller Sans’s that lurked around in timelines. He knew what his Papyrus felt like, then.

All he had to do was grab the monster’s skull in his hand and press it to the floor for him to stop squirming.

“I wouldn’t do that too much if I were you, buddy. You’re fragile, remember? I could break ya whenever I want to.”

“Mmmph” was the only response Sans got, which made him laugh. Was he actually crying?

“Wow, kid, I haven’t even done anything yet and you’re already starting the water works. Kind of pathetic, don’t you think?”
He hunkered down and straddled the smaller Sans’s legs, which made the shaking monster jerk and begin to struggle again. Sans grabbed him by two of his ribs and pressed him down to the floor.

“Mmm, what did I say about fighting?” Sans purred, running a few experimental fingers along the ribs of his little self. Through the fabric, all he could elicit was a few pitiful pleas, so he ripped off the cloth and grasped blueberry’s bottom-most ribs and stroked them a little.

“Come on now, buddy, this doesn’t have to be painful. Just do what I say and stop the squirming and we’ll have some fun, okay?”

Sans pulled down his counterpart’s ridiculous pants and the squeal he got in response was extremely satisfying. Could it be rape if it was with himself? He didn’t really care, honestly. He was already turned on and with a small burst of magic he made himself a cock and pressed it tightly to the monster’s pelvis.

“Stop crying and make something I can fuck,” Sans demanded. The little Sans beneath him fervently shook his head and sobbed, but the noise was mostly hidden with the tape over his mouth.

Sans grabbed the ribs he’d been stroking and gave a testing bend. The sharp intake of breath was enough to tell him that the blueberry understood the message. Sans pulled away for a moment and the pitiful excuse for a monster beneath him used magic to make himself a crude and rudimentary entrance.

“Don’t tell me this is your first time, blueberry,” Sans growled, touching the tip of his cock to the magic blue substance. “Hasn’t your Papyrus taught you anything yet? Heh. Whatever. Guess I’ll just have to show you.”

Sans thrust forward into the shivering mess beneath him and the screams it caused just made him pull out and slam back in all the faster. He couldn’t really see the other Sans’s face, but he could hear the desperate sniffles and feel his body tensing and struggling.

“Ohhh fuck that’s good,” Sans groaned, finding a rhythm and pounding the unwilling skeleton into the carpet. “Usually I’m the one getting fucked up like this- this is fucking incredible.”

The Sans beneath him cried out with each thrust, grunting or groaning as his face was repeatedly forced into the carpet and his hands moved listlessly to try and get free of his bonds. Sans found himself close in only a few minutes.

“Ah, shit, I’m gonna cum…” he growled, and even though the body beneath him had stopped fighting, the words made it start up again. He had his hands on either side of the pelvis as he ground into the skeleton’s make-shift hole. The little Sans cried and began to rock around in an attempt to get free, but that only made Sans go faster.

“Oh yeah, I bet you like that, don’t you?” Sans used his hands to slam the little fucker’s pelvis down onto his cock. “I bet you want me to cum, don’t you?”

He was too busy focusing on his close he was to notice the sound of a door shutting downstairs. He only noticed they weren’t the only two in the room when quite suddenly a hand was around his throat and he was thrown off and out of the bawling skeleton beneath him.

Sans hit the wall with a hard thud. His sight cleared just in time to see Papyrus- or, a Papyrus, he should say- standing over him in an orange hoodie and a cigarette still burning in his mouth. Bright, unbridled orange magic flared in his eye sockets. Sans felt himself wilt.
“Hey there pal. I don’t think my bro was enjoying that very much-“ Sans yelped as a conjured bone shot through his chest, missing his ribs by inches and embedding itself in the wall behind him. Papyrus sent a few more flying and wedged Sans into the wall, making it impossible for him to move or even struggle free. He stared up at the tall skeleton and the burning magic and he knew he’d picked the wrong Sans to mess with.

“Heh… sorry…” Sans tried, but Papyrus had blipped and was crouching beside his brother, untying him and cooing and making Sans sick to his stomach with a mixture of disgust and jealousy at having a Papyrus that cared that much about their Sans.

The Sans he’d been fucking tried to stand, but fell back immediately. Papyrus caught him and held him steady, glaring at the Sans pinned to the wall all the while.

“B-brother… I-I-I’m sorry-“

“Hey now, lil bro, ain’t your fault. Why don’t you go downstairs for a second while I take care of this- I’ll be right down, okay?”

Sans was going to be killed. He grimaced but glared stubbornly at the two alternate versions in front of him. Blueberry met his eyes for only a second before he looked away again.

“What… what’re you gonna do to him, Papy?”

“Aw, bro, don’t worry about it.”

“I don’t want you to hurt him, brother,” Sans said. The bigger monster on the wall blinked in surprise and looked at the small, half-naked version of himself.

“Sans…”

“I don’t. I-I don’t think his Papyrus was very nice to him…”

Shit. Sans looked away, he shouldn’t have said a damn word about his Papyrus. At least if they killed him he’d eventually get reset to his timeline- his stomach was already starting to turn when he thought of what he’d done.

“That doesn’t make it okay, Sans, what he did to you was bad,” the strangely cool and composed Papyrus said.

“Please, Papy… don’t hurt him…” Sans begged, tugging gently at his brother’s hoodie. It made the Sans on the wall want to vomit.

The thing was, Papyrus actually listened. He stood up, taking Sans with him, and glared at the monster on pinned to the bedroom wall.

“Allright, bro. Let’s go get you some new clothes, okay? We’ll worry about him later.”

Sans looked at Sans. The one on the wall would have given anything for a final bone to come and deplete his one HP, but it didn’t. He started struggling as Papyrus turned to leave the room.

“Well? Fucking kill me, you stupid prick! I raped your brother, or don’t you care?”
Papyrus kept walking. In just a moment, Sans was left alone in the room with the lights off and only his own darkening thoughts to keep him company.

He’d never gotten stuck in a timeline before. He tried to struggle free of the bones in him, but to no avail. Why were they doing this? Wasn’t it enough that he got beaten and fucked in his own damn timeline, now he had to own up to what he’d done in this one? Why wasn’t his Papyrus here instead? Sans tried to pull free of the bones one last time, but he only succeeded in making his small shred of life quiver. He fell back against the wall like a ragdoll.

Not for the first time, he wished he was dead.

Chapter End Notes

Who knows where this will go.
i sure don’t
Sans managed to doze off, so when the door creaked open again he had no idea how long he’d been out. He was sore and stiff from being pinned to the wall for so long, but pain was something he could handle. The emotional baggage, though, he could do without.

It was Papyrus who came in and shut the door behind himself. How odd to see a Papyrus that wasn’t hostile, or one that actually gave a shit what his brother said. Sans smirked idly as he walked over and looked down at the helpless fucker on the wall.

“If you’re gonna do it, make it snappy. My back is killing me,” Sans joked. Papyrus didn’t even crack a smile. His hands were shoved into the pockets of his cargo shorts and he said nothing.

“Come on… don’t tell me you’re still upset about earlier…” Sans teased, and that was all it took for Papyrus’s eyes to flare and a bone to come dangerously close to impaling itself in his skull.

“God, you’re disgusting,” Papyrus said. Sans ground his teeth and tried to shove his head forward, but the sharp end of the bone disappeared in a flick of magic and he was once again left without an escape.

“Fuck you, just do it already,” Sans growled.

“Nah, because you want that. I’m not giving you what you want. Not after what you did to my Sans.”

“So you’re just gonna keep me here? So I can do it again once I get free? I’ve seen a lot of pussy Papyrus’s but this is a new low.”

“The only reason you’re still alive is because Sans asked me not to kill you. Otherwise you’d be dead.”

“Well? You’re a Papyrus and you’re going to listen to a Sans? What kind of twisted place is this? You could kill him any time you wanted.”

That made the tall skeleton flinch, and Sans was satisfied with that for a while.

“Why are you so awful?” he asked. Sans knew it was rhetorical.

“S’called getting the shit beat out of you all the time. You might be a pansy and care about your
Sans but my Papyrus keeps me around to do his dirty work and suck his dick.”

Papyrus recoiled at that, but the anger in his features faded a little.

“I hate it when my little bro is right,” the bigger monster sighed as he ran his hand along his skull.

“That’s a very Papyrus thing to say,” Sans remarked, “but your Sans is kind of an idiot.”

There was a sharp bone to Sans’s throat in less than a second, but Papyrus seemed to remember that Sans wanted that only after he’d done it. The tall skeleton pulled away but gave one of the bones a twist, making Sans huff in pain.

“Don’t you dare say shit about him,” Papyrus warned.

“Heh, you got it, Boss,” Sans said. If he could’ve shrugged, he would’ve, but he was immobilized.

“If you so much as look at him the wrong way, you’re going to regret it.”

“Okay, boss.”

“You’re a piece of shit.”

“Yeah.”

Papyrus looked away pointedly before he stalked back to the door.

“Apoloitize.”

“Okay.”

Papyrus gave a frustrated groan before he left the room and slammed the door shut again. Sans was relieved. He let out a breath and felt the familiar lonely pit grow in his stomach. It was easier to not think.

Sans sat downstairs, coddled and warm and drinking tea his brother had made him. Papyrus was
in the kitchen doing his best to make some tacos for his brother, but Papy wasn’t very good at cooking.

When the tall skeleton came in and sat down again, he gave Sans’s shoulder a soft pat. Sans’s bones still hurt from being abused, but it wasn’t so bad. His thoughts were occupied, which took his mind off of it.

“That guy is going to have a bad time,” Papyrus said. Sans looked up at him to see his brother looking away angrily.

“You didn’t hurt him, did you?”

“No, but he’s a big jerk. A real stinky pickle, Sans.”

Sans laughed a bit, but then his thoughts went to the ‘him’ upstairs and he let out a breath. “I don’t think he meant it, Papy…”

“Sans, it isn’t like that. It doesn’t matter if he ‘meant it.’ It was wrong.”

“I know, Papy, but… if his Papyrus did that to him… what if he thinks that’s just how it is?”

Papyrus let out a huff. “No, he knows it’s wrong, and he knows that what he did was awful. You’re the bravest person I know, Sans, but don’t try to excuse what he did… some people don’t deserve that kind of love.”

“I’m not! I’m really not, Pap, but… I think we can help him. He’s me, right? Somehow? So that means he must be okay deep down.”

“Bro…”

“I want to try, Papy,” Sans said. He put his tea down on the table and looked up at his brother with big, strong eyes. “I believe in him.”

Papyrus looked at his brother in a mixture of frustration and awe. He would have argued, but he knew it would’ve been pointless.

“Bro, you’re the coolest person in the whole world. I guess if anybody can change him, it’s you.”

Sans brightened immediately. “Thank you, Papy! I won’t let you down. He’ll be as great as I am in no time- he just needs some work.”
“If he tries to hurt you again, he can’t stay,” Papyrus warned.

“Okay. He won’t. I know it.”
Sans’s arms were tied above his head, fastened to something he couldn’t see because Papyrus’s cock was in one of his eye sockets and the other was brimming with tears.

“Aw, Sans, I haven’t even started and you’re already crying.” Papyrus purred as he inched himself further into Sans’s skull. Although he had a gag in, Sans cried out and tried to pull away. It hurt like hell- he could feel it pulsing inside of him where it wasn’t meant to be, his magic trying so hard to push it out, but that just seemed to spur Papyrus on even more.

“Be a good brother and let me fuck you,” Papyrus said softly. He grabbed Sans’s head on either side with enough force to leave scrapes on the bone before he pulled out of his skull and slammed back in with enough force to send a spasm through Sans’s body and bile rise in his throat. The pain was excruciating- his consciousness swam and drifted as Papyrus repeated the action and started fucking his eye socket.

“It’s so much better that you can’t talk,” Papyrus panted as he built a rhythm and thrust himself in and out with enough force to make the back of Sans’s skull ache where it was beat into the bedframe. “You sound so much better when you’re screaming and begging, Sans.”

Sans could only struggle and scream and cry for so long before his vision went fuzzy and all he felt was the pain of being screwed so mercilessly and the shame of being completely powerless to stop it.

Sans woke up from the dream with a yelp. He felt the phantom pain in his eye and wished he could cup it in his hands, but then he remembered where he was and what he’d done and familiar nausea rose in his stomach and he was almost sick.

“Fuck… it’s not real, Sans, just a dream. Stop bein’ a baby. Don’t you dare start crying… don’t be a baby…” Sans said to himself, and it took a little while, but he eventually calmed his rapid heartbeat and evened out his breathing. He tested the bones in the wall once more to find they were still as stable as ever.

Sans didn’t like being alone with his own thoughts. Having time to think meant he had time to think about the things he’d done, not just to blueberry muffin Sans but to himself, and to his brother, and generally he hated having time to think because he hated thinking.

It took a little while and a lot of pain, but eventually Sans was able to shake and twist one of his arms enough to loosen the bones pinning it to the wall. They were lodged in at different angles, so there was little hope of him freeing himself, but with the bone loose he could at least maneuver his arm around enough to catch on some of the sharp splinters and distract him from his wayward mind.

Pain was familiar. The sharp, clean, physical pain of his bones being scratched raw and chipped
made him grit his teeth, but he continued for a while. He could hear voices below him in the house, but the words were unintelligible. He imagined what they were saying by piecing together syllables. It didn’t make sense.

He didn’t expect the other Sans to come, but after the voices downstairs had quieted the door creaked open and a short head peaked inside. Sans glared at the freshly-clothed version of himself, but he didn’t seem to notice.

“Go on, Sans, I’m right behind ya,” Papyrus said from where Sans couldn’t see. Without hesitation the little Sans hurried into the room and came closer to the Sans on the wall, with his big brother walking right behind him.

Sans’s arm was close to his side, so he kept running the raw bone along the splinters. “Didn’t expect to see you again so soon,” he remarked. He felt shooting pain in his arm. “How can I help you?”

Other Sans cleared his throat pointedly and stood up tall. The timeline-stranded monster was impressed- it took him days to recover from something like that. But this little round fucker was already at full height and addressing his attacker.

“I’m afraid that it will be I who does the helping, me,” the little Sans said. “I know you didn’t mean to do what you did. Er, well, you did, but I don’t think you knew that it was wrong.”

“Yeah, I knew,” Sans said. The other Sans looked down but one look at the anger in Papyrus’s eyes made the Sans pinned to the wall give a big shit-eating grin.

“Pretty gutsy to recover this fast, huh? Maybe you aren’t such a pansy after all.”

“I am- no! I’m not a pansy,” Sans said with an indignant huff. “But this isn’t about me, this is about you.”

“I am you,” Sans said with a grin. His counter-part pouted for a second and looked back to Papyrus for reinforcement.

“Papy, tell him to cooperate, please,” Sans asked oh-so politely.

“Stop bein’ an asshole,” Papyrus said immediately, burning eyes still locked on the wall Sans.

“And don’t swear!” Sans hissed, giving his Papyrus a sharp smack to the femur. Papyrus actually chuckled.

“You guys are fucking disgusting,” Sans growled as he brought his arm down on a splinter and scrunched his face in response. “I can’t believe you’re supposed to be me.”

“Listen, man, no need to make faces, you’re already ugly enough as-“ Papyrus began to say, but his Sans moved forward quickly and came around so he could see the other Sans’s injured arm. He laid a soft hand on it before he saw the splintered, chipped bone and recoiled.

“P-Papyrus! He’s hurt!” Sans said. “You promised you wouldn’t hurt him!”

Papyrus was close by in a second. Sans was enjoying the panic of the situation, and he hoped his actions would drive them over the edge and let him die already.

“I didn’t, bro, I swear.”

“Yeah shrimp, he really didn’t,” Sans added.
“Then you- why did you do this?” Blueberry demanded, standing nearby as Papyrus inspected the wounds. “You could’ve died!”

Sans laughed- an actual, unexpected bark of laughter. “You think this is enough to kill me? Oh man. You guys really don’t know anything…”

“Sans, go get the first-aid kit,” Papyrus commanded. There it was- that was what a Papyrus was supposed to sound like! Sans was so distracted by it that he barely noticed the words.

“What?” Sans asked, but Blueberry was already off and out of sight. He looked at the orange hoodie for answers but the skeleton before him just frowned.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Sans growled as Papyrus reached a hand forward and held Sans’s arm still. The shorter monster attempted to struggle, but he was powerless in the situation. He didn’t understand. When the other him returned and they dressed his wounds he still didn’t quite get it.

His Papyrus would’ve sworn at him and kicked his ribs for doing that. He watched in disgusted silence as small, familiarly unfamiliar hands wrapped bandages around his arm and secured it back to the wall so he couldn’t hurt himself again.

They were talking to him, but he glared at the floor and ignored them. He kept catching glances of those big blue eyes, wet with tears, and the orange hoodie.

It was only when a gentle hand was laid on his shoulder that he wrenched his head up and bared his fangs at the short, round skeleton that was touching him.

“No more hurting yourself- okay?” he asked softly, and the kindness in the words made Sans want to heave.

“Leave me the fuck alone,” he growled, and just like that the hand was removed from his shoulder and the Papyrus in the room gently guided Sans out of it, giving the one pinned to the wall an unreadable look before they both departed.

Sans tried to chip his bones again, but to no avail. There was an awful feeling in his stomach like grease, dark grease that wouldn’t go away, so he distracted himself by listening to the voices below. He couldn’t hear a word.

They weren’t supposed to care.
Chapter 4

Sans came back alone next time. He had something in his hands, but the wall-bound monster didn’t care to identify it. He was glaring side-long at the floor.

“Oh, you’re awake! I thought you’d be sleeping by now…” Sans said as he came forward and brought something into view. It was food.

“Kind of hard to sleep when you’re pinned to a wall, pipsqueak,” Sans mumbled under his breath.

Blueberry shifted and came a little closer and offered an apologetic smile. “Sorry… I forgot.”

Sans wanted to bark at him how much of an idiot he was, but he didn’t have the energy. The other Sans came before him and sat down on the floor, closer to eye level with his counterpart.

“How does your arm feel?”

Sans didn’t understand until a moment later when he looked down and saw the bandages. He grimaced.

“Feels fine.”

“I thought you might be hungry… so I brought you something to eat.”

“Are you gonna un-pin me?”

“Papy says I can’t…”

“Then I’m not hungry.”

The entire exchange was awkward and unsettling, but Blueberry seemed miffed by the response. He pouted and poked idly at what appeared to be a taco salad.

“Do you do that a lot?”

Sans blinked and looked down at the little him on the floor, but Blueberry wasn’t meeting his eyes.

“What?”
“Y’know. That.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“The- the chipping-!” Sans finally managed to say, and it made the other Sans suck in a sharp breath and huff.


“I… well… I don’t know. It’s not good.”

“It’s better than nothing,” Sans mumbled. He didn’t like being questioned by this weak doppelganger, but he also didn’t want to be alone with his thoughts again.

“Is that why you hurt me?”

The question was so straightforward and brash that Sans didn’t have the mind to even think about the words. The pansy-Sans was staring him down with wide, uncertain eyes, but he seemed determined.

“Before. When y-you-“

“I know what you’re talking about,” Sans said roughly. He didn’t want to watch the little runt stumble over his words. “And no. Just drop it.”

“I want to know. I know you feel bad about it.”

“Doesn’t mean I want to talk to you about it.”

“Well- I am you. Somehow. So… so maybe I could understand if you-“

“You think me talking is going to make you understand why I fucking *raped* you?” Sans sneered, and it made the little blue Sans flinch and recoil to rub his arm, but he didn’t leave. He took a shaky breath.

“I-I… I want to help.”

“Why? I literally fucking-“ Sans took a deep, angry breath. “Look. I get it. You’re a good person so you think that if you ‘can’ help somebody that means you ‘have to’ but listen. You don’t. I don’t
want your help. You can’t help me. So just… get your brother to kill me already so I can reset back to my own timeline and suffer without all this goddamn guilt making me nauseous.”

“B-but you just said it! You feel guilty! That means you aren’t all bad- and that means that you can change. I believe in you- I know you can, because you’re me, and I can do anything I set my mind to.”

“Can’t you just leave me alone,” Sans grumbled. He didn’t like to think and the blueberry fucker was making him think pretty damn hard.

“I…” the other Sans looked at the floor for a bit before he raised his eyes and tried to catch other-Sans’s. “I feel like… you’ve been alone for a very long time…”

Sans flinched at the words and tried to think of something smart to say in response, but there was nothing to retort. He opened and closed his mouth a few times as the timeline’s native Sans watched him, and eventually all he could do was grunt and look away.

“I… wouldn’t know what that’s like, though, because I’ve always had Papyrus. So… I’m here for you. We can be friends, if you want to.”

Sans grit his teeth and closed his eyes. Friends? What the fuck was the point of having friends if he was just going to get reset someday like everything always did and they’d forget him? What was the point in anything?

“I know I can’t offer all that much, but… I’ve been thinking about it, and we can’t both be Sans. So I’m gonna call you ‘Red,’ okay?”

“I’m sorry,” Sans croaked, barely audible.

“D-do you not like it? I can think of something else if you-“

“I’m sorry,” he said again, and this time Blueberry heard him. The little Sans had just begun to rise from the floor but stopped when he made sense of the words. He said nothing.

“I was a dick. I’m no better than my brother,” Sans mumbled. He felt like he wanted to cry, but he didn’t. He couldn’t show that kind of weakness. He didn’t dare glance up at the other Sans, though, electing instead to keep his eye sockets closed and try to forget the lingering pain from his nightmare.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and jerked his head up to spit something, but he came face-to-face with Blueberry and saw that his eyes were wide and enormous, a little watery, but starry.
“Has he ever apologized?” Sans asked.

“Apologized? To me?”

Sans nodded.

“God, no.”

“Then you’re already much, much better than he is,” Sans said before he smiled gently. “I accept your apology. Why don’t we just start over, okay?”

Red looked at Blueberry for a moment but said nothing. Who the hell did this guy think he was? This puny, weak little runt was acting like he was the one in control, like he’d known Sans was going to do this all along- it set Red’s teeth on edge but also made something warm grow in the pit of his stomach.

“Whatever,” Red grumbled, and that appeased his counterpart.
Chapter 5

They unpinned him after three days of being stuck on the goddamn wall. Papyrus didn’t leave his side the entire time, keeping his untrusting eye sockets on the shorter monster.

Blue, as Sans had begun to call him, was eager to talk, and that made Sans uncomfortable to some extent, because nobody had ever wanted to talk to him before. When he was asked what his favorite color was, he didn’t really know. Nobody had ever asked him that before so he’d never thought about it. Blue asked him what his favorite food was and he’d replied with “whatever my bro gives me that doesn’t taste like shit” which had driven the shorter Sans to scurry off and try to make something incredible that Sans would just melt over.

“Don’t try anything funny,” Papyrus warned him as the three of them made their way down the stairs and to the living room. Red was having a little trouble walking after being immobile for so long, but Blue helped him along even though the physical contact made the former squirm.

“Don’t bite the hand that feeds you and all that bullshit, yeah?” Red said, but then he nearly fell and if it wasn’t for Papyrus’s steadying arm he would’ve taken a tumble down the stairs.

“Red! Language,” Blueberry scolded, but the other Sans just frowned and shook off the helping hands as he made it to the ground floor of the home and used the wall to support himself.

“He can sit on the couch, bro, but you’ve gotta keep an eye on him.”

“I will, Papy, don’t worry.”

Papy. Sans hated when Blue said it, what a disgusting nickname, but he couldn’t really protest it. Papyrus was a pretty long name, after all, not short and simple like ‘Sans’ or ‘Red’ or ‘Blue’ and ‘Orange’ wasn’t great either. Still, Papy made Sans’s stomach turn. Which was really something, considering he didn’t have a stomach in the first place.

“I’ll be in the kitchen if you need anything,” he said, giving his little brother a (disgustingly) affectionate pat on the head and Red a warning glance before he strode off to the house’s little kitchen area.

“Do you need help to the couch?” Blue offered, but Sans shook him off and huffed.

“No, I’m not a baby, I can make it.”

“It’s okay to need help someti-“

Red was already halfway across the room and nearly falling over his own feet. Sans sighed but trotted to make up for the distance.

“Are you sure you’re okay? Your arm doesn’t hurt or anything? Do you want-“

“I said I’m fine you whiny bitch,” Sans hissed. Blueberry seemed taken aback for a moment, but Red hauled himself onto the couch with visual discomfort and effort. He put a little too much weight on his arm and nearly fell again, but Blue was there to keep him steady.

“Stop touching me,” Sans said.

“You were going to fall-“
“So let me fall.”

“That isn’t what friends do,” Sans huffed, but then he hopped up on the couch beside his counterpart. “Well, here we are! The couch. It’s really a lovely place. Papyrus says that if you behave you can sleep here!”

“Cool,” Red said, but he was more interested in relaxing into the softness and sighing. It was so nice compared to being skewered on the wall. Blueberry seemed to notice this.

“So is the couch incentive to try being a better person?”

“Yeah yeah, half-pint. I already told you, I’m not gonna do anything to you or your bro. It’d just fuck up the timeline and things would get messy.”

“Actions speak louder than words,” Blue said like some kind of mountain sage.

Sans didn’t say anything, just laid back and stretched a little bit. The dizzying guilt was beginning to dissipate as he realized that the little blue fucker actually forgave him for what he did, but the knowledge that he’d knowingly raped the guy was still fresh in his mind.

“So… how’s your arm?”

Sans groaned and flipped over on his side so he didn’t have to face his chatty ‘friend’ who wouldn’t leave him alone.

“I said it’s fine you annoying cretin, can’t I just- I dunno, nap?”

“Nap!? But we’re supposed to be doing something fun! Naps are for lame nerds- and also my brother.”

“I heard that, Sans,” came Papyrus’s voice from the kitchen. Red chuckled before he caught himself and went silent again.

“Don’t encourage him, Red, he is a bad influence. He naps and slacks off and doesn’t do his job.”

Papyrus appeared in the doorway to the kitchen, leaning heavily against the door in a ‘cool’ pose. “Come on, bro, that hurts. Deep down in here-“ he laid a hand on his chest.

“Stop lying, you big lazybones. It’s the truth.”

Sans wanted to make some kind of comment about how disgusting the exchange was, but he just laid on the couch and tried to think about something else. Was it disgusting? It was sort of funny. They were acting like… well, he didn’t know. Friends? Brothers? Were people who cared about each other supposed to act like that? It isn’t like he’d know.

Papyrus laughed. “Just let him sleep, lil bro. Being a piece of shit probably takes a lot out of you.”

Sans relaxed. Piece of shit. Good. That’s what he should be called.

“Papy! If this Sans is going to stay with us you need to be nice to him- or at least pretend to be!”

“Piece of shit is good, actually,” Sans said quietly. He thought it was funny. They didn’t laugh, though. He opened one of his eyes- habitually, it was the one his brother didn’t use as a sex toy- and saw them both giving him looks.

“What? That’s what my ‘Papy’ calls me,” he said, certain to put emphasis on how gross the
nickname was.

“I was joking, though,” Papyrus said. He stared Sans down until the skeleton shut his eye and used his hand to scratch at the other socket as the normal flash of pain hit it.

“Whatever. Nap time.”

Surprisingly, neither of them protested. If he’d cared about his life in any way he wouldn’t have been able to fall asleep with those two so close, but if they decided to kill him while he slept, good for them? He didn’t really care. He was tired.

He was going to ride out his days of relative peace until they killed him. He let out a heavy breath, aware that the other Sans was mere inches away, but he fell asleep anyways.
Sans was prodded awake some time later by Papyrus. He tried to hide his initial fear, but after a second he remembered where he was and who the Papyrus in front of him cared about and he stilled his shallow breathing.

“Get up, fucker. Sans made you something to eat.”

“Language, Papy,” Red said as he sat up, doing his best imitation of the other Sans. It was pretty good considering that they were the same person.

“That’s super funny, asshole. Get up,” Papyrus said as he all but threw the shorter skeleton onto the floor. Sans ‘oof’d’ but he was glad to see that at least somebody in this timeline still had some sense-the hateful glance he got when he laughed was enough to remind him that Papyrus still hated him as much as ever.

He would’ve antagonized the tall skeleton further, but then he smelled something cooking and he was reminded how goddamn hungry he was. He pried himself off of the floor, sore as hell but a little more steady, and hobbled to the kitchen doorway.

“Red! You’re awake, that’s good!”

“Arguably,” Sans said, but Papyrus gave him a threatening look and the foreign Sans had to sigh.

“I made you something to eat—“ the little skeleton said, but he was facing the stove and cooking something in a skillet. Sans walked over to see what he was doing, because he’d honestly never watched anybody cook before.

Papyrus caught his arm as he got close and pulled him away. He had a look of distrust about him.

“What the hell? You think I’m gonna flavor him to death?”

“Not him I’m worried about gettin’ hurt,” Papyrus said offhandedly, glancing down at Sans’s bandaged arm. The monster grimaced and looked away, but didn’t try to get any closer.

“That’s right, cooking can be very dangerous if you don’t know what you’re doing!” Blueberry said, “but worry not. I’m quite talented at preparing food, and since you never ate the taco salad I made you, I figured the original dish would be a good introduction to culinary artistry.”

“I don’t even know what you said but okay,” Sans replied, standing close to Papyrus but far enough away that if he tried to suddenly attack Sans would have time to get away.

“So, Red,” Papyrus said, putting a little emphasis on the nickname like Sans did to his, “my bro and I are kind of curious about what the hell happened to get you here. You got any idea how you just sort of showed up?”

“Dunno. Probably has something to do with the timelines and alternate universes and shit, but it’s been years since I was into that stuff.”

“Papyrus, you like science,” Blueberry commented while stirring what appeared to be meat around
in a pan. “Don’t you have any ideas?”

“None that don’t bring up a hell of a lot of questions,” he admitted, shrugging and putting his hands back in his hoodie pocket. “Mainly about how this guy could be smart enough to research theoretical physics and timeline anomalies.”

Sans leaned back against the wall, pleased with the glare he was getting from Papyrus. “What? You don’t think I’m smart? That hurts.”

“Don’t take this the wrong way, Red,” Blueberry began with a concerned expression, “but if we’re the same person that’s a good question. I can’t stand my brother’s science-type stuff.”

“Me and pops used to do research on it. That was back when we lived with him in New Home a good five years ago. Kinda sucks we had to leave, it was the only thing I was good at that my bro couldn’t do for shit.”

“You mean Gaster?” Papyrus asked quietly. Sans’s hands slowed as he finished cooking and poured the meat into a bowl. His eyes were wide.

“Who else would I mean? Feel bad for the guy, honestly. Asgore used to beat him the hell up all the time, fucked him, all sorts of bad shit. He’s the king so he can do what he wants I guess, but man, he was as bad as Papyrus. Maybe worse, actually.”

“You have a King?” Sans asked.

“Uh, yeah? You don’t? Asgore. Y’know, big, tall Boss Monster, real sharp horns, goat-lookin’ guy.”

“What about Toriel?”

Red blinked. “Well damn, she left his dumb ass a long time ago. She lives in the Ruins, and boy am I glad she doesn’t come out. We talk through the door sometimes- she’s real nasty. All bitter about her kids dying.”

“Okay, alright, hold on,” Papyrus said, interrupting the conversation. “Lets just… it sounds like our timelines have some big differences, but you can’t just drop that you worked with Gaster and then shrug it off like its no big deal.”

Red shrugged. “I mean, what do you want me to say? We found out about the timelines and the resets, me and Paps left for Snowdin, he’s still probably getting beat up by the King, whatever.”

Sans was getting everything ready, including some cheese, lettuce, and some red sauce that Sans couldn’t identify. He balanced it all on his arms with some level of skill, but Papyrus went and took some of the bowls before he could drop them. He handed one to Red and motioned to the table.

“Well, how about we just eat for now. This is making me uncomfortable. I knew about timelines but this is just insane.”

Sans looked at the bowl in his hands, full of orange cheese. He looked up to see Papyrus waiting for him to move.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” Sans asked.

“Take it to the table. We’re gonna eat.”

“At the table?”
Papyrus shot his brother a weird stare before he led the way out of the kitchen with his bowls of food in tow. Blueberry hurried over to Sans and waited for him to go first.

“Trust me, it’ll be great. I made extra in case you’re hungry.”

“I’m kind of starving, actually,” Sans said, and when Blueberry laughed he blinked.

“No, literally. I haven’t eaten in like a week.”

“Oh,” Blue said, then he smiled and all but kicked Sans to hurry up. “Well, you can eat now! Go on, follow Papy.”

As it turned out, the tacos were incredibly good, and Sans hardly had the patience to learn how to wrap it all up in the soft shells before he was devouring the meat with a fork and making a mess of the salsa. It was red. He decided that red was his favorite color.

“Slow down there, bud,” Papyrus remarked as Sans reached for his fifth shell. He didn’t quite look amused, but he seemed at least at ease.

“Slow down my ass,” Sans said with a mouthful of food.

“Red! Please, you could at least try not to swear… and please don’t talk with your mouth full.”

“Why?”

“It’s rude!”

“To who?”

“I-! Oh. Well, I don’t know, it just is.”

Red swallowed what was in his mouth before he grinned at his little blue counterpart. “I hope you’re making this again sometime, Blueberry. I could eat fifteen of these.”

“Yeah, about that, you probably shouldn’t,” Papyrus remarked. He stretched one of his long arms over and took the shell that was lying open on Sans’s plate.

“What the hell?” Sans groaned, and even if this wasn’t his Papyrus he knew better than to fight for food with somebody bigger than you. He picked at the scraps on his plate for a moment before those, too, were gone, and then he just sat back in his chair.

“I’m… actually sort of surprised,” Papyrus remarked, still holding the shell in his big hand. “You didn’t even try to take it back.”

“How are you two still alive?” Red asked. “You don’t pick fights with people who are bigger and stronger than you. That’s, like, rule number one of How Not To Die.”

“I wouldn’t have killed you if you tried to get a sixth taco,” Papyrus said.

“And I was supposed to know that…? How?”

Once again, the two brothers shared a worried look, but then Blueberry shook his head and held up his hands.

“Let’s not fight! I’m glad you liked them, though!” Sans all but sang. He had big stars in his enormous eyes. “I’ll make you more whenever you want, just let me know.”
Red blinked at the little skeleton and his big happy smile and his dumb, childish outfit and didn’t even know what to say. He looked at Papyrus, as though for answers, and without much warning the large skeleton leaned forward.

“You managed to get salsa on your cheek, lucky it didn’t go in—“

His thumb came within inches of Sans’s eye socket and his body reacted like lightning. His plate crashed to the floor along with the chair he’d been sitting in as he scrambled to get away from the skeleton.

“Don’t fucking touch me,” Sans breathed. His chest was rising and falling like he’d just ran a marathon and he was shaking. Blueberry quickly stood up from the table, a troubled look on his face, but Sans just took another step back and stared at Papyrus.

“I—I… uhm…” Papyrus said, and the uncertainty in his voice pulled Sans out of it. He remembered that this wasn’t his Papyrus and the embarrassment and shame came a moment later.

“Are you okay?” Blueberry asked, eyeing the mess on the carpet and the broken plate on the floor.

Sans couldn’t calm his breathing and he couldn’t stand the looks the two were giving him. Especially Papyrus. His breath hitched and he brought his hand up to rub roughly around his eye socket, the awful not-real pain back again.

“Red, you—“

“I—I’m fine. Great. Just—just fuckin’ peachy,” he said a little too quickly before he turned and hunched over so he didn’t have to look at their faces again. “Never been better. Fuck.”

“Hey, man, all I did was—“

“I said I’m fine!” he hissed, but there wasn’t any venom in it. He felt his legs begin to wobble and he went to the wall for support, only to lower himself down to the floor a moment later.

He wasn’t fine. He scratched at his socket and tried to take something out of it that wasn’t really there. His breathing was getting shallow and his head spun. Papyrus hated it when Sans got like this—said he was weak, worthless, good for nothing. Said he wasn’t ‘right’ and wasn’t healthy. He shut his eyes tight, still clawing at the one, and readied himself for a blow to ‘knock him out of it.’

He felt steady hands on his arm and the one that tore at his bone was drawn away from his face. He looked up to see Papyrus—his breath hitched— but then he remembered that it wasn’t his Papyrus.

“Fuck, man, are you okay? Deep breaths.”

“Go away. Leave me alone,” Sans tried to growl, but they came out more like whines. “Don’t—don’t fucking touch me.”

“You’re hurting yourself,” Papyrus said. Sans grit his teeth and looked down to see dust from scraped bones on his clothes. He hissed as the pain pulsed in his eye again.

“God fucking— damnit. Shit,” he breathed, scared to find himself almost on the verge of tears. “Let me go.”

“Red, calm down, take deep breaths,” he heard Blueberry say, but he closed his eyes and pretended that nobody was there. “You’re going to be okay. We’re not going to hurt you.”
He wished he could say he spat at them and made them leave, but the memory of his brother skull-fucking him till he passed out was still very much burning in his mind and he barely had the energy to hold himself upright, let alone struggle free of the hands holding his arms down.

He tried to block out the rest of their words, because they made him feel bad, and they made him remember that he was literally no better than his brother. He’d raped Blueberry- he didn’t deserve any sort of kindness from these weird, disgusting skeletons. It was all he could do to keep himself from crying and shut out the world. His eye socket was pulsing in pain that he couldn’t do a thing about. And the skeletons wouldn’t leave him the fuck alone so he could feel like garbage in peace.

He felt himself being picked up and eventually laid on the couch. He felt somebody sit down beside him and tense words were said, but he didn’t pay them any mind. He was so fucking tired and embarrassed and ashamed, all wrapped up into one.

He felt something being laid over him and opened his eyes in time to see Blueberry carefully wrapping him in a blanket. His eyes were wet, but Red closed his again before the other Sans could see he wasn’t actually passed out or asleep.

He’d deal with them later. He’d deal with everything later. He wished he could just die in his sleep, but he was used to not getting what he wanted, so he’d just deal with it later.

Chapter End Notes

world building? character development? mental issues?
i actually have no idea i’m just letting this thing go wherever it wants to. i’ve got a general plan but. yeah.
Sans woke with a gasp and clutched at his eye socket- it was the same nightmare. It was always the same damn nightmare. He shivered despite being covered in warm fabric, false pain lancing its way across his face.

“You okay?”

Sans jerked his head and saw Papyrus sitting on the couch, keeping a respectable distance but still close enough to make Sans draw his legs up in fear and press himself into the arm. He didn’t answer right away- only cupped his eye socket and watched the monster for any hint of a sign that he was going to attack.

“Hey, relax. I’m not going to hurt you or anything.”

“Fuck you,” Sans tried to say, but it wasn’t threatening at all. He’d be surprised if Papyrus even heard it.

Papyrus had his hands in his hoodie pocket and a lollipop in his mouth. He was relaxed, and he only looked at Sans for a minute before he looked away again.

“Sans is out on patrol- he left you some tacos if you’re hungry. I figured you wouldn’t be.”

Red didn’t answer. He watched Papyrus, memories of what had happened and his little episode coming back to him.

“So what was that all about?”

“Leave me alone,” Sans said. He sounded pathetic and pitiful. Even he could hear it.

“I can’t. Not after you tried to tear your eye socket out and you passed out on the floor from me touching your cheek.”

“I’m sorry. Okay? I’m sorry, for hurting your bro or whatever, I’m fucking sorry. Just leave me alone.”

Papyrus seemed a little taken aback, but he didn’t respond. Sans pulled himself up in a ball to make himself as small and unnoticeable as he could, like he always did when he felt threatened.

“Just go away or kill me,” he complained.

“Is this because of the resets?”

Sans flinched, but the skeleton had hit the nail on the head. He didn’t meet Papyrus’s eyes.

“You don’t know what it’s like.”

“I know what the resets-“

“But you have him.” Sans said, and it made Papyrus go silent. “It doesn’t matter what I do, it always goes back to zero. When I fight back and die, it goes back. When I fight back and I kill my brother, for a while it’s better, but then it resets and I have to look him in the face knowing that I murdered him. You think you know what that’s like? Really?”
Papyrus didn’t say a word. Sans averted his gaze and shivered.

“Timelines like this aren’t fucking fair. You get to be happy while I get… I get nothing. I get my eye socket fucked till it’s all I can dream about and the pain won’t go away no matter what I do. So I show up here and I see your stupid little Sans and his bright, disgusting attitude and I just- it isn’t fucking fair.”

“Why not stay?”

“Because who the fuck wants me?” Sans said like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“My lil bro wants you to stay. He thinks you can still be a good person if you try. It sounds fucked up and it’s no excuse but I understand. Y’know. I understand what you did.”

“I’m not a good person. I can’t be a good person, either. I’m a fucking mess. You saw what just happened- I can’t even function like any normal monster should. I don’t know why your Sans is trying so hard. I don’t know what he wants me to be.”

“He just wants you to try.”

Sans looked at the tall monster and saw him watching- like he was daring Sans to do something. Sans held his gaze for a second before he had to look away.

“Trying doesn’t mean shit. I’m a failure. A big, fat, pathetic failure.”

“Doesn’t mean you can’t try.”

“Why are you so interested all of a sudden?”

“I dunno,” Papyrus said with a shrug. He looked up at the ceiling and rolled the lollipop on his tongue. “Call me a bad brother, but your life is so fucking awful that I can't stay mad at you for what you did. Not when you break down in the living room like you did earlier. As much as I wanted to snap your neck for hurting my baby brother, he was right. And I agree with him. So, to answer the question, I'm interested all of a sudden because I think you can actually do it.”

Sans didn’t have a damn thing to say to that. He curled in on himself and stared at his knees, unsure of what to do with his body.

“Listen,” Papyrus said as he rose from the couch, “you don’t have to do anything. Sans would be happy if you just stayed here for a while, honestly, but that isn’t going to help you. Just… give it your best shot, alright? S’all I’m asking.”

Sans said nothing as Papyrus left the house. The door shut behind him with a click.

Sans stayed where he was, the implications of being left alone heavy on his shoulders. He stared at the kitchen- even if they’d hid them, he could easily find a knife and end it.

He thought for a while.
“I can’t believe you left him home alone, Papy, after everything that happened.” Sans scolded as he burst into the door of the house, but then he stopped. He’d clearly been expecting the worst. Red turned to look at him from the couch and jumped to his feet.

“Oh- you’re back,” he said kind of lamely. Blueberry hurried over to him and gave him a good once-over, but seeing nothing wrong he just stood back as his brother strode quietly over to him.

“See? I told you he’d be fine.”

“Papyrus! What if he’d gotten worked up again?”

“I’m, uh, I’m right here,” Red said, and the tone of his voice made Blueberry stop and look at him again.

“Are you okay? Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine, just, uh…”

Red scratched at the back of his head. He didn’t want to do this. He sort of just wanted to sleep and forget but he felt awful just using the two skeletons for their warm house after he’d- he stopped the train of thought and took a deep breath.

“Thanks. For the food. It was good.”

Sans’s eyes suddenly had stars in them, and it made Red look away immediately. Why had he thought this would be a good idea? They were going to laugh at him or mock him or-

He felt two little boney arms wrap around him for only a moment before they pulled away again. Blue was grinning like he was excited- it made Red blush despite himself.

“You’re welcome! Did you eat the ones I left for you?”

“No, wasn’t too hungry,” he said. He watched Sans for any sign that the short skeleton was going to bring up his moment of weakness but Sans just shook his head.

“That’s alright, I understand. You’re sure you’re okay? You don’t need anything?”

“Nah. M’ fine, really. I, uh, tried to clean up the kitchen, probably fucked it up more than I fixed it but… yeah.”

Blueberry took off for the kitchen, and it left Red to stare up at Papyrus, who’d been watching the exchange without saying a word. The tall skeleton had a different lollipop in his mouth, but he took it out to give Red a small smile.

“You cleaned!” Sans chirped, popping his head out from the kitchen doorway. “Thank you so much, Red! It looks great!”

He knew he was blushing but he didn’t know what to do about it. Luckily, if Papyrus noticed, he didn’t say anything. He walked by Red, laying his hand on the shorter monster’s shoulder for a moment.

“Good job, man.”
Papyrus sat down on the couch while Sans tried to calm down and cool his face. He stood awkwardly for a second, but Blueberry shot out from the kitchen a moment later and hurried over to the two skeletons.

“He’s much better at cleaning than you are, Papyrus,” Blue remarked, giving Red another big smile. “Which is to say, he did it. Because you never clean anything.”

“Untrue, little bro,” Papyrus said with a laugh in his voice. “I pick up most of my socks.”

“You wouldn’t need to pick them up if you’d just put them in the dirty clothes hamper like a normal monster!”

The two continued to bicker for a little while. Red sat down on the floor and watched, not really hearing the words but before he knew it he was enjoying the atmosphere.

Nobody was going to hurt him. They weren’t going to hurt each other. He didn’t have to worry about having another breakdown because they weren’t going to hurt him if he did.

It was an odd feeling, to not be alone. He kind of liked it.
Chapter 9

A whole week passed since Sans first arrived and things weren’t awful. The idea of things not being awful was so foreign to Red that he sometimes wondered when something would snap and he’d be shot back to his own timeline, but it didn’t happen. He’d never been in a different reality for more than a few hours- the idea of being able to stay enticed him the longer he lived under the alternate skeleton’s roof, but he knew he couldn’t.

“Hey Red, I’m going on patrol, wanna come with?”

Sans looked up from the puzzle he’d busied himself with to see Papyrus standing at the door. Blueberry had already left for work, leaving behind a container in the fridge labeled ‘Papyrus and Not-Me Sans’ with some taco meat inside.

“Seriously?”

Papyrus shrugged. He was wearing his signature orange hoodie that Sans hoped got washed sometimes. Since his old jacket had kind of gotten ruined by being impaled on bones, Sans was wearing a black shirt and an old blue jacket of Blueberry’s.

“Figured it must get boring here alone.”

“I’m used to it,” Red remarked with a smirk. He got up off of the floor and stretched, satisfied with the popping of bones in sockets. “But, yeah. I guess I will.”

“Alright. Come on, then. If anybody asks, you’re Red, and you’re our cousin from New Home. Cool?”

“Totally cool,” Sans said to mock Papyrus’s mannerisms. It earned him an annoyed groan from the taller skeleton, but he followed him out of the house, more excited to get out and see the town than he tried to let on.

“So, you got a Grillby’s?” Sans asked as he stepped out into the well-worn path in the snow. Papyrus appeared a moment later, locking the door behind him before he tucked the keys into his hoodie pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes in its place.

“Nah. There’s one up near the Capital. We have Muffet’s. It’s a nice little café.”

“In my timeline Muffet’s the spider bitch that’ll sell you a donut if you pay her out your ass. If you wanted to go through Hotland without the elevators you had to pay her or she’d get her pet to eat you.”

“Wow, that’s, uh, not at all what it’s like here. She’s real nice. Wanna stop?”

“Aren’t you supposed to be working or some shit?”

Papyrus laughed as he put a cigarette in his mouth and lit it. He offered one to Sans, who accepted, and lit his as well.

“Yeah, just don’t tell Sans. You probably shouldn’t tell him I gave you that, either. He’ll get pissy.”

“Why?” Sans asked, breathing in and watching the smoke rise from his clothes before breathing the majority of it out through his mouth. “It isn’t like we have lungs.”
“He doesn’t like the smell,” Papyrus said, and Sans huffed. The tall skeleton gave him a look. “Didn’t take you for a smoker, though.”

“M’ not, really. Just an alcoholic.”

Papyrus laughed. Sans felt something warm in his chest and was glad that the cold was already making his face a little flush. It had taken their little talk for Papyrus to even try opening up to the alternate version of his brother, which Sans couldn’t blame him for one bit. As it turned out, he had a lot more in common with Papyrus than he’d originally thought.

“Sans’ll yell at you for that, too. Then again, I guess, you don’t really have money to buy anything anyways.”

“Yeah,” Sans said. He puffed the cigarette for a minute longer before Papyrus finished his and started walking.

They didn’t talk all that much on patrol. Papyrus would go off to do something and Sans would walk around, finding the weird similarities between their worlds and also the weird differences. The two girls that ran the shop and Inn were real lookers—Bratty and Catty, Papyrus had called them. They’d waved to Sans on the way by, and he’d waved back, but Papyrus kept him hurrying along.

“Aw come on… they were hot.”

“They’re also way out of your league, asshole,” Papyrus said. The last word didn’t really have the venom it did before— it was sort of nice.

They were in the forest about two hours later when they ran into Sans. Literally ran into him. Papyrus turned a corner and Blueberry ran right into his chest, sending them both flying onto the snowy ground in a tangle of bones.

Red laughed as they untangled themselves and stood back up. He didn’t think much of it— people falling was always funny. But even when they stood up and brushed themselves off they both remained silent and looked at him in a weird way.

He wiped a tear from his eye socket and laughed. “What? That’s hilarious. Don’t give me that look, you’re both fine.”

Blueberry blinked. “Oh! It isn’t that. I’ve just never heard you laugh like that before.”

Sans stopped laughing and frowned.

“Oh come on, don’t be like that,” Papyrus said. He had something in his hands. “Hey, what do birds use as a swear word?”

Red didn’t have time to answer before a snowball hit him in the side of the face.

“Duck!”

Blueberry giggled as Papyrus blipped out of sight and Red was left scrambling to find him. He turned this way and that but couldn’t find a visual.

“You got him good, Papy!” Blueberry laughed, doubling over on himself. Sans took the opportunity to lob a ball of snow at him. It hit the top of his head and he gave an ‘oof’ before coming up with a snowball in his hand.
The war had begun. Sans watched for the teleporting monster, listening for the crackle of magic in the air as a tell-tale sign. He heard it to his left and lobbed a snowball without thinking, and just as Papyrus appeared it hit him square in the jaw.

“Oh ho! Red, how’d you know?” Blueberry asked in awe.

“Trade secret, fucker,” Red replied, but Papyrus had already wiped the snow from his face and was seconds away from retaliating when Sans gathered up his magic and teleported into a nearby tree.

“What! He can teleport too?” Blueberry whined. Sans could see him from where he stood crouched on a branch, as well as Papyrus standing close by. They were both looking around but neither of them noticed him in the tree.

He threw a pinecone into the branches opposite him and as they turned to identify the noise he dropped down, careful of the fall, and got them both in the back of the skull.

“Ha! You guys are pathetic!”

Papyrus was already down and getting another snowball ready, but as he threw it Sans waved his hand upwards and conjured a bone that deflected it to the side. When Blueberry’s came a moment later, he snatched the bone from the ground and used it like a bat to knock it away.

“Holy shit he’s actually good at this,” Papyrus breathed. Sans stood with his bone-bat and gave the two a shit-faced grin. Red was already getting tired from using his magic, but he conjured two extra hands and used them to put together a snowball while he held the bat.

“You guys… really need to practice..” Red huffed. God dammit he was tired already. He threw the snowball at Sans, but the little fucker side-stepped and got out of the way in time.

He watched as Papyrus blipped out, and this time he didn’t wait for the crackle. He rolled to the side and readied yet another ball on the fly before he came to a stop and saw Papyrus standing where he’d been only moments before.

“Damn you’re quick,” Papyrus breathed, but there was laughter in his voice. “Too bad you didn’t account for…”

“Teamwork!” Red looked over just in time to see Blueberry throw the snowball, but he didn’t have time to dodge. It hit him in the head and he fell on his ass, but he just laughed and tried to get back up.

His vision swam and he stumbled again, falling on his hands and knees. His breathing was heavy, but he was used to getting pushed to his limits. Still, it’d been a week and he hadn’t so much as touched his magic, and his head felt fuzzy.

“Shit…” Sans hissed, but a moment later he felt a hand on his back.

“Are you alright?” Blueberry asked, and Sans had the mind to look up and see him lowering himself down on one knee. He grinned at the smaller Sans but it was short lived.

“Haha, yeah, I’m… phew. I’m fine. Just… a little tired.”

"Then sit down! It's just a snowball fight, you don't have to give yourself a heart attack."

Red laughed a little at Blueberry's worrying, but his small hands guided him to sit against a tree and he pulled off his little blue scarf and put it around his counterparts neck.
"You wait here! I'll go finish my rounds and then we'll go home."

"You're like a mama bird," Papyrus remarked, but he was smirking.

Red sat back. How fucking weird was it to not have to be on edge all the time? He wanted to laugh again but he didn't, electing to smile vaguely and catch his breath while the two brother's talked for a moment about their routes and what else had to be done before the end of the day.

He felt the scarf around his neck and let out a breath. It was kind of nice, actually.

Things weren't awful, and it was nice.
“Hey, Red? We should talk.”

The monster blinked, looking away from the robot on TV (who wasn’t quite as violently entertaining as Mettaton but still pretty cool) to see Papyrus standing by the arm of the couch.

“What’s up, Papyrus?” Blueberry asked. The two Sans’s were watching the show together- timeline-native Sans was a big fan of this Napstablook DJ guy, it seemed, so Red had agreed to watch some of his show with him.

“It’s been a few days, I think we need to talk about what happened with the whole ‘major breakdown’ thing.”

Red looked away instantly, a sludgy feeling in his chest. He didn’t like to think about how he wasn’t right. He scooted over, though, as Papyrus came and sat down on the couch with the two other skeletons, facing towards them so they could talk.

“As much as I’d like to ignore it, I think if you’re going to stay, we should know about what that was and how to not let it happen again, if we can help it,” Papyrus continued. Red still averted his gaze, but he let out a huff.

“I dunno. I thought you were gonna stick something in my eye- that shit hurts. So I did what any normal guy would do and got the fuck out of there.”

Both of them were quiet for a little while, which just made Red all the more uncomfortable. He eventually had to look up to see the two exchanging more worried looks, but he just hunched forward and put his hands on his knees and let out another big breath.

“Listen, Red… it isn’t like we’re mad about it or anything. You just got really freaked out there and we don’t want that to happen again, man,” Papyrus said.

Red didn’t want it to happen again either, but he just shrugged. “I’ll try not to do it anymore,” he mumbled.

“Red,” Blueberry began in his mama-bird voice full of worry, “you’re the only person we care about with this. You know that, right? There’s nothing wrong with you for having a panic attack or a breakdown, whatever you want to label it. But Papyrus is right, if we know more about it we can be more careful so we don’t trigger anything else.”

Sans sort of wanted to say how stupid and pussy that idea was, that they’d have to cater to him for being a broken fucking mess, but Blueberry had a hand on his shoulder and Papyrus was watching him with worried eyes. He looked at the floor.

“S’not your job to do that, though. You guys already gave me a place to crash and food to eat, I’m not gonna ask you to tip-toe around me like a basket-case or what-the-fuck-ever.”

“Red, don’t talk like that,” Blueberry scolded, and it made the monster grimace but the little Sans was quick to go on.

“I, for one, care about you, and about you being comfortable. If you don’t want to talk about it right now, that’s okay! But you can, if you want to. Did something happen to your left eye socket?”
The monster’s face must have said it all, because Blueberry withdrew his hand from Red’s shoulder.

“Hey, no pressure, dude,” Papyrus chimed in, giving Red’s skull a soft pat. “I won’t go trying to jab my fingers in your socket anymore, ‘kay?”

“Mm,” Sans mumbled. He didn’t meet either of their eyes.

“If it hurts, though, we could go get it checked out-“

“No,” Red hissed immediately, quick enough to surprise even himself. The thought of anybody prodding around in his eye socket made him want to throw up.

“Okay, okay, we won’t do that, then,” Papyrus said.

“We just want you to feel better!” Sans added, chipper as always. “Do you want us to know anything else, just to be safe?”

A thought flew to Sans’s mind immediately, but it made his non-existent stomach drop to the floor and the idea of saying it out loud made him ill. He shook his head, but the thought remained. He hadn’t even thought about it- could the other skeletons do it? Was there a chance either of them would know anything about the weapons project?

“You look like you’ve got something to say,” Papyrus said.

“No, I got nothing,” Sans said, but it was a lie and Papyrus seemed to know it. But the tall skeleton didn’t press him, and with a few more grossly encouraging words he left and Blueberry complained about missing the show, but they went right back to watching.

Sans couldn’t really concentrate on it anymore. He was doing that dangerous thing called ‘thinking’ again. Sans and Papyrus could tolerate his breakdowns, but what if he…? Sans grimaced at the memory of searing pain and being something that was barely even him anymore.

Without realizing it, he’d grown attached to the two alternate versions of he and his brother, and the sudden idea that something he couldn’t control would make them hate him was sickening. As much as he hated it, their gentle words of optimism and encouragement made him feel like he was doing something right and not just being a waste of resources. The fact that they cared enough to ask what triggered his reaction a few days prior warmed him somewhere he didn’t even know could be warm.

The idea that it could all be ripped away was distressing. The thought swirled in his head and no amount of DJ’ing Mettaton-swaps could make it go away.

He cared what these monsters thought about him. It was a dangerous sentiment.
“Come on, Sans, you can do better than that. Or, actually, you probably can’t. You are kind of a waste.”

“Please… I-I’m doing the best I can, boss, I-“

The rope around Sans’s neck tightened as his brother yanked him forward and nearly wrenched his neck off of his shoulders. He yelped and clawed at the chain-link collar, but even with actual claws it was no use.

“You’re not doing enough you ungrateful whelp. When I say transform I don’t mean half ass it like you do everything else. It’s disgusting enough that I have to force you and watch. Do you need a little stipulation?”

“N-no, please… I-I’m trying, really, I can’t go anymore, it hurts, Papyrus, please-“

“I don’t care if it hurts. We are raiding Waterfall tonight and you’re of absolutely no use to me on two legs. So you had better shift and you’d better do it soon.”

Papyrus gave the collar and rope one final yank, bringing the shivering abomination crashing to the floor again. He was half-shifted, not entirely a skeleton but not in his weapon-form either. He could hardly breathe, every bone ached and begged him to stop, but if he didn’t change he was going to get punished, and he didn’t know if he could take it.

“I’ll be back in an hour. If you still look like this when I return, there will be consequences.”

Papyrus left the room. Sans barely noticed. He gasped for air as the pain ripped through him in waves. He didn’t want to change. He didn’t want to go on a raid and kill other monsters. But the screaming pain in his eye socket reminded him that he had to.

He tried to lift himself up, but his bones were brittle and tender and he fell again. He was crying, big, wet tears that made it even harder to find purchase on the hard, cold floor. He clawed at his eye socket and his muzzle regardless of the way his vision blurred and his body protested. He hated this. He hated everything. He hated being a fucking animal and he just wanted it all to end.

He gritted his fangs and gave it one last push. He screamed and twisted in agony, but it was enough.

When Papyrus came back, it was to a fully-formed weapon.

Sans jolted awake too late to stop it. He panicked. He couldn’t stop himself from letting out a sob as he grabbed at his slightly elongated face with horribly sharp claws.

“No no no, not here, please,” he begged, but there was nobody to beg to. He scrambled off of the
couch and fell heavily on his side, nearly crushing the beginnings of a tail that was snapping and cracking as it formed. He should never have thought about it. They were going to treat him like an animal, just like his brother did, they’d kick him out and he’d have nowhere to go-

“Shit- shit, no, no no no-“ Sans whined, holding his head down to the floor and arching his back in vain attempt to cope with the pain. The noises that escaped him were horrible, even to himself.

“Red? What’s going on, are you o-“

The voice cut off and Red threw up. It was sticky, liquid magic, excess from the transformation that he couldn’t afford to vomit up but that his body did anyways. He fell back and tried to still himself, because he heard Blueberry’s footsteps and he didn’t want anybody to have to see this. It was disgusting. He was disgusting.

“Papyrus! Papyrus, help!” he heard Sans shout, and he opened his eyes in time to see the short monster standing over him with big tears in his eyes.

“Don’t- don’t watch- go away-“ Sans choked out, but then a new wave of pain and snapping bones hit him and the words turned into screams.

“Oh god, o-oh my god, Red what’s happening- I don’t know what’s happening- Papyrus!”

“I heard you bro I’m-“

“Papyrus something’s wrong, o-oh my god, Papy-“

Red felt hands on him and he wailed something even he couldn’t understand. Somebody grabbed his head and he came face-to-face with Papyrus.

“Red, listen, you’re going to be okay. Deep breaths. Relax.” The skeleton’s face was composed but his hands were shaking. Red didn’t understand- he wasn’t okay. He’d never been okay. But he was weak and the way the skeleton held his head made the waves of agony just a little more bearable.

“I fucking- I f- I fucking can’t-“ he hissed, trying to struggle free of the skeleton’s grip as he felt his spine shift and snap and change.

“Yes, you can. Listen to me, Red, it’ll be over sooner if you don’t fight it. You have to calm down. You’re safe. Nobody is going to hurt you here. It’s okay.”

“Hurts- so fucking much-“ he snarled, but there was nothing to it. He kept thrashing, but Papyrus kept talking, and he felt a gentle hand running along his skull.

“I know. I know it hurts- this happens to me, too. It’ll be okay. You’re safe. We’re both right here.”

“I can’t- control it, I can’t fucking-“ Red cried, well aware of the fact that he was bawling and that his struggles were growing weaker by the second. It didn’t register that Papyrus knew what was going on- his mind was in a frenzy and he couldn’t think straight.

“It’s okay. It’s alright, Red, you’re fine. You’re fine.”

Papyrus’s voice was steady and calm, and even if Sans was trying his hardest to block out everything around him it still drifted down and helped him fight off the bouts of pain. It was almost over, anyways- when it happened like this it didn’t take long. He felt the bones of his face snap and disfigure into the familiar snout. Seeing it made him want to vomit again- but he just cried and squirmed. The ghostly blue of his magic lit up the room around him like some kind of surreal limbo.
It only lasted a couple of minutes, but it was enough to drain every ounce of energy from his body. Red relaxed, if only because he didn’t have the strength to try and support himself. He was shaking and sobbing and he didn’t want to move because then he’d have to think about what the hell he was.

“Shh, Red, it’s okay. It’s over. You’re alright, Red, I promise.”

“I want to fucking die,” he cried, shutting his eye sockets tight enough to hurt. “I c-can’t do this. I can’t fucking do this.”

“Shh… you’re okay…” Papyrus almost cooed, and any other time Sans might’ve been disgusted, but he was a shaking and shivering mess and he didn’t protest one bit as Papyrus laid his head on his lap and continued to stroke his skull. Another wave of pain, so much softer, but to his weak and fragile bones it was like being bludgeoned.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I-I’m sorry.” Red sobbed. What was he sorry for? He didn’t know. Everything. Whatever he’d done to deserve this.

“It’s okay… Red, it’s okay. We’re both right here. We’re here.”

“He made me- he made me do it. He made me kill them, I didn’t fucking want to- oh god I didn’t want to- I’m s… I’m so fucking sorry, he made me do it…”

“Shh… it’s okay, Sans, it’s gonna be okay.”

“I didn’t want to- I didn’t want to do it- he made me do it- he made me- I-I never wanted- ngh-” Sans cut off with a sharp whine.

“Shh… shh, I’ve got you. You don’t have to do it ever again. You’re safe now. You’re okay.”

“I’m just like him- I didn’t fight it- god I can't fucking do this anymore can’t I just fucking die and stay dead, please- please-“

Red felt arms wrap around his mid section as Blueberry began to violently sob into his ribcage.

“N-no, Red, please, you’re not like him- please stop, Red, it’s okay. I won’t let him hurt you ever again.”

“I’m so fucking sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry, oh fucking god I’m so sorry, Blue, I-I-I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, it’s okay, I forgive you. I forgave you a long time ago- it’s okay. Please… please be okay, Red…”

He didn’t have the strength to say anything else. He sobbed into Papyrus’s lap as the tall skeleton stroked his strange, long skull and Sans curled up near his narrow ribcage and hugged him and cried. He thought about it. He thought about everything and how fucking awful it all was. Everything he’d been holding back came out and he couldn’t stop one bit of it.

“Please don’t leave me,” Red croaked. “I’m sorry. I can turn back- I can-“

“Don’t you dare- don’t you dare, Red,” Papyrus cut him off, and it was only then that the malformed and weaponized monster noticed that the tall skeleton was crying. “We aren’t going anywhere. You don’t have to be alone anymore. We’ve got you. This is okay. It doesn’t matter if you’re broken, okay? We’ll still be here.”

Red cried. He cried for a long time, even when his body eventually ran out of magic and he changed
back, naked and shivering and terrified. Sans wrapped him up in a blanket, close by and always with a gentle hand on Red, and Papyrus held him close to his chest while the broken monster sobbed like a fucking baby. He wanted them to touch him- for the first time in his life he wanted to be close to somebody. So when Papyrus gathered him up and sat down on the couch and Blueberry wrapped his arms around the shuddering monster, he moved into their warmth and wished it would stay like that forever.

He didn’t loosen his grip on either of them for a long time. He felt safe in their arms. He felt safe- when had he ever felt safe? Had he ever felt safe? The thoughts made him gasp a little and shake.

“Shh, Red, we’ve got you.” It was Blueberry this time who was running a soft, gentle hand along his skull. “You’re with us now- we won’t let anything happen to you. You’re safe. Please don’t be scared anymore.”

Red listened to the gentle sound of the skeleton’s voice and curled himself up as close as he could to it’s source.

He didn’t care if he was weak. He didn’t care one bit about it anymore, because they didn’t care, and they were still there- even after everything, they were both still there.

They were still there.
Red sniffled. He felt the familiar shame and awkwardness of having broken down like a fucking pussy, but he was too tired and upset to really care about it and try putting on his big tough asshole face. He was curled up in a little ball on the couch, close enough to be touching Blueberry but no longer burying himself in the other Sans’s ribs. Papyrus had gone to the kitchen for a moment- it had been a few hours since he’d changed back and he hadn’t spoken since. He didn’t say anything when Blue left a gentle hand on his side as he rested- it was kind of nice.

“Okay, back again, with three Papyrus specials,” the tall skeleton announced as he walked into the room. The bags under his eyes were bigger than usual, but then again, it was still the middle of the night.

“Thank you, brother,” Blueberry said quietly, and he gave the skeleton’s side a soft little pat. “You want some, Red?”

“What is it?” he mumbled, keeping his eyes low and avoiding the monster’s worried looks.

“Hot chocolate, homemade from the packets you buy at stores,” Papyrus said as he came over and handed one of the three mugs he balanced to his brother. His voice was caring- was that was a big brother was supposed to sound like? He stood over Red, who looked up and saw a sympathetic smile on the big monster’s face.

“It’ll make you feel better,” Papyrus tempted, holding out a red mug for Sans to take. Blueberry was already sipping his, but he had his eyes on his counterpart to see what he’d do.

“Mmmf,” Red huffed, but he sat up with a groan. His body was sore and tender from being subjected to so much uncontrolled magic. He took the mug and was immediately glad; it was radiating heat that seeped into the monster’s bones and made him let out a little sigh.

“It always makes me feel better, at least,” Papyrus said with a shrug. He held his own mug carefully as he sat down on Red’s other side. “You ever had it before?”

“Don’t think so,” Red murmured. He raised the mug to his mouth and took a little sip- holy shit. It was heavenly. His reaction must have been pretty visual, because Papyrus let out an amused breath and leaned back into the couch.

“See? I told you,” Papyrus said, smiling. “It has a whole shit-load of magic in it, should help with the sore bones, too. We’ve got medicine for that, though, if this isn’t enough.”
“M’fine. Really,” Red said, a little uneasy at being waited on like he was. "I ain’t that much of a baby bones,” he said. The pain was so familiar and commonplace that the idea of it worrying others was… hard to comprehend. He didn’t think about it too much, just all but chugged his hot chocolate and let out a deep breath when he’d drained his cup.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Blueberry asked, still working on his drink. Red looked away for a second and shrugged. He didn’t, but he figured they deserved to know.

“Not much to say. It happens sometimes, I guess. Really fucking hurts and sometimes I can’t change back for a few days but it isn’t like there’s much I can do about it, so,” Red finished as Papyrus took his mug from him and set it on the table beside the couch.

“Well, that depends, man. If it’s like me and my bro’s then you can work on it. Stops it from happening randomly, y’know?”

“You can both do it?” Red asked, looking at Blueberry with wide eyes. The idea of the excited little ball of energy being able to turn into a weapon was hard to believe, even if it was borderline humorous.

“Well, it happens to me more, and Sans’s are usually pretty mild, but, yeah,” Papyrus said.

“Why?”

Papyrus looked at Blueberry for a second before giving Red a bit of a raised brow.

“What do you mean…? We don’t know why. It just started happening once our magic came in.”

“Is that not the case for you?” Blueberry asked. He clutched his mug tightly in both hands.

Red frowned and looked at the floor. “We did it on purpose,” he said.

Both brothers were silent for a moment, so he continued.

“Me and Gaster, y’know. We did it to ourselves. Apple doesn’t fall far from the tree or whatever, he’s kind of a pussy, so am I, we both got beat up by the bigger dogs. We found a way to make ourselves stronger without Paps or Asgore finding out, so we did it.”

“You…” Blueberry began, but then he swallowed and cut off.

“Worked out great, for a while. It hurt sometimes, and he was better at controlling it and was a hell of a lot stronger, but I was alright at it too. Then the King found out what we’d done and… well. Him and Paps were real quick to exploit us when we were in ‘Blaster Mode’ or whatever dumb name dad gave it,” Sans broke off to stare at the floor, last nights dream coming back to him. He shivered. “My bro liked me a lot more when he could put me on a leash.”

Red was quiet, and he wished he had more hot chocolate so he could sip it and not feel as numb and awkward as he did. He felt Blue lean into him, and that instinctual part told him to move away, but he didn’t. He was surprised when he saw Blueberry’s half-drunk cup being offered to him.

“Here, I’m done, do you want the rest?” he asked softly. Red looked into those damn huge eyes and then away again. He took the mug without a word, only a quietly mumbled ‘thanks’ in reply.

“That’s… that’s really messed up,” Papyrus said. “Jesus, Red, I'm sorry.”

“Yeah I know, but just in general, man. You’ve had it rough for a really long time. You didn’t deserve that.”

Red felt an involuntary warmth go to his cheeks and his chest. Papyrus sat beside him, close enough that he could feel the bigger skeleton’s gentle warmth, but not close enough to touch him.

“But,” Blueberry said, “now that we know, we can help! Papy and I learned how to control it pretty well, so if you want us to teach you what we know, we’d be happy to.”

“Happy Papy to,” Papyrus said with an awful little wink, and then laughed at his own stupid joke.

Red smiled a bit. They weren’t upset about him not telling them. They weren’t going to treat him any differently. Without really thinking about it, as the brothers giggled at the stupid rhyme, he leaned against Blue’s side and let the warmth of him and his mug of cocoa dull the pain.

“Papyrus, that was very awful,” Sans said, even though he laughed a little. Red could feel his body move as he did it- it was so nice. Another monster was letting him be this close- another monster wanted him to be this close. He smiled idly.

“Don’t be a pansy, Sansy,” Red said softly. He was exhausted and still sort of out of it from his episode, but he huffed in amusement at himself.

Sans burst into giggles and gave Red a very soft push while Papyrus let out a loud bark of laughter, the noise rough and harsh but so very nice to listen to.

“Good one, bro,” Papyrus said when he recovered.

Sans nearly choked on his sip of hot chocolate when he said it. He looked up at the skeleton for the telltale signs that it was just another joke, because he wasn’t Papyrus’s brother, but the monster was giving him a big, earnest, lazy-ass grin.

Bro. He liked that. He felt his face get hot but he felt so warm inside and the hot chocolate was so good. If he’d felt better he might’ve joked about it, but he just stared down into the film on top of his drink and didn’t notice he was smiling until Blueberry leaned back into him and Papyrus slung an arm around his shoulder.

It was nice. This was nice.

Red fell asleep after he’d drank two cups of hot chocolate and the exhaustion of what had happened overtook him. Blueberry eased himself out from under the bigger monster, smiling as he had to gently pry away his hands from his shirt. Two weeks- it had only been two weeks and Red was already so much better.

Papyrus watched, but there was something dark in his eyes. Blue understood. He covered Red with a blanket and tucked a pillow under his head, leaning down to gently touch skulls before he stood again and went to his brother.

“He’s literally been through hell,” Papyrus said quietly. “God, Sans, he did it to himself.”

“I know. I know, Papy,” Sans said, careful to keep his voice down so he wouldn’t wake Red. “But he’s here now- we can help him. You want to keep helping him, right?”
“Of course, lil bro. I didn’t expect him to actually try… but, uh, fair warning, Sans.”

Sans looked down at the sleeping skeleton. Papyrus hardly ever got angry, but when he did Sans could feel it radiating off of him in waves.

“If his Papyrus shows up here, I’m sure as fuck not helping him.”

Sans watched as Red let out a deep breath in his sleep. He looked so peaceful when he was sleeping—unlike when he was awake. He couldn’t scratch at his eye socket or frown or look so darn haunted all the time.

“If his Papyrus shows up, lets teach him a lesson together, okay?” Sans said, looking at his brother with determination in his small, round features.

Paps grinned. “You got it, bro.”
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Sooo I was gonna start wrapping things up this chapter but decided, hey, no rush, tbh. But, after chapter 14, the end will be upon us.

WARNING: LOTS of talk about self harm, suicide, etc in this chapter, proceed with caution

“Hey, bro.”

Red didn’t look up for a moment because he figured Papyrus was talking to Blueberry, but then he remembered that he’d already left for patrol. He turned, still washing some dishes that Blue had told him to clean up, and saw Paps standing in the kitchen doorway.

“Oh- hey. What can I do for ya, bro,” he said, putting a little bit of mocking emphasis on the last word. He was feeling much better- a few days of blissful monotony had passed since his second breakdown, so he was up to making fun of the endearing term that in all honesty warmed his heart.

Red finished up his chores and turned to face Papyrus.

The tall skeleton smiled, but then it faded. “Actually, I wanted to talk to you about something while Sans is away- that cool with you?”

Red immediately wanted to say “no” but he didn’t, only swallowed and put on his best poker face. “I guess. As long as you don’t chew my ear off about Napstablook like Blueberry does, yeesh.”

Papyrus chuckled a little. “Nah, no worries, I’m not too big a fan of that guy, he’s a little full of himself.”

“A little?”

“Just a bit,” Papyrus said. God, why did it feel so good to make him smile? It was almost as nice as when Blueberry smiled at what he said- Red didn’t even know how to describe what it made him feel but he knew it was good and that he wanted to continue feeling like that for a long time.

“Seriously, though… I want to talk to you about something a little heavy,” Papyrus said. Sans wished the mood could’ve stayed humorous but he just frowned. Papyrus leaned against the door frame, a little bit of a sad look on his face.

“How much have you been chipping lately?”

Red’s stomach fell immediately and he looked at the floor.

“I’m not mad-“ Papyrus continued, “or, like, gonna freak out or whatever, I’m just a little worried. It isn’t that big of a deal but you had your sleeve pulled up just now to do the dishes and…” Papyrus trailed off, purposefully avoiding what he was about to say, and Red was glad he did.

“It’s nothing. Seriously, I know when its enough to do more than just hurt. Don’t’ worry about it.”
Papyrus just frowned before he sighed and beckoned Red to come into the living room with him. Red didn’t really want to, to be quite frank, but he did anyways, following the monster to the couch, where he sat down beside Papyrus with a groan. He wasn’t a baby bones.

“Listen, Red, I know you’ve been having a rough time, but you keep letting these things build up until it’s too much for you to handle on your own- you can talk to me and Sans about it, yeah?” Papyrus offered.

Red looked away. “Yeah.”

“Aw, dude… look, it isn’t like people in this timeline don’t do it, too. I did, when I was younger. I totally understand, it’s an outlet, and maybe back in your timeline it was your only outlet for stuff, but… just, try to talk to one of us before you do it next time, okay?”

Red looked away and didn’t answer.

“…Red?”

“I don’t think you want to talk about it, that’s the thing,” he said. “I mean for fuck’s sake I don’t even want to talk about that shit, let alone make you remember it too. I’m fine. You guys worry too much.”

There was a small pause. Papyrus looked to be deep in thought, which Red was glad for, because it meant he didn’t have to hear how worried the monster was about him hurting himself.

“I think you and my bro need to have a talk about what happened,” Papyrus said softly, and it was so sudden and it made the short skeleton all but puke.

“Fuck no, are you insane? I couldn’t… what the fuck,” Red said, staring at Papyrus like he’d been asked to suck his dick right then and there. “He probably wants to forget it ever happened, cause I know for damn sure I wish I could forget about what my bro’s done to me.”

“I know it’s hard, but… it’s bothering him. I think it’s the least you can do, to be honest,” Papyrus said.

Red flinched, but deflated at the words. They weren’t hostile, but he knew Papyrus was right. The taller skeleton continued:

“I understand what you did, and so does he, in a way, but talking to him would help. It’d help you a lot, too, I think.”

“It isn’t like I can ever make it up to him,” Red mumbled. He was feeling guilty and sad and uncomfortable. “I mean, shit, it isn’t like… like it was the first time I’d ever…”

“I know,” Papyrus said, so Red didn’t have to continue. He looked sad. “I know that you did it because you didn’t care anymore. I’ve thought about it a lot, to be honest, and I’m guessing you knew that if you hurt Sans, that I’d show up and kill you. It’s really fucked up and twisted, and I’m still not excusing it, but at the same time… jeez, man.”

“It isn’t like I had to do it to die. Could’ve easily just hopped off the bridge out of town, or gotten a knife and-“

“Stop. Red-“

“It isn’t like it would’ve been the first time I’d off’d myself, either,” Red went on. He felt a little
numb talking about it. He’d never talked about it and had somebody who would actually listen. “Or
the second. Or the third. Dying was always easier than living, but after a few resets I realized it was
like sleeping and I’d just wake up again and-“

“Red.” Papyrus said sternly, and the skeleton blinked and looked up to see Papyrus staring at him in
mild horror.

“Oh. Sorry, got a little carried away there.”

“No, it’s okay, just…” Papyrus sighed. “Do you want to keep going?”

“I dunno. Not really,” Red said quietly, shrugging. “It’s pretty fucked up stuff, especially for you
guys.”

Papyrus was quiet for a little bit. Red sat on the couch, mind wandering back to the first day, guilt
building in his stomach as the gravity of what he’d put Blue through weighed heavily on his
shoulders.

“We want to help you. Both of us, like, we really honestly do,” Papyrus said. “I think it’d be really
cool if you could be happy here. You deserve it, I think, after everything that’s happened.” Red
averted his gaze, so unused to such open talk.

“We want to help you. You’ve just gotta let us in, okay?” the tall monster asked, reaching out a hand
and putting it gently on Sans’s shoulder.

Red reached up and idly put his hand on top of Papyrus’s, maybe to pull it away. His mind was still
sort of unresponsive, but then he looked at the- what was that emotion? Caring?- on Papyrus’s face,
and how gentle his hand was and how hard he was trying to help somebody who didn’t deserve one
damn ounce of it.

“Do you want to see?” he ventured hesitantly, looking up at Papyrus.

“See?”

“The… y’know. Chipping or whatever. So you stop worrying so damn much.”

Papyrus seemed surprised, but then his face seemed to relax and he nodded gently.

“Yeah, lets give it a look.”
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

i can't promise daily updates since i'm back in school but I will try to keep them comin on the daily~

also check out this HELLA RAD fanart somebody did, it's super great and I love it http://bacawica.tumblr.com/post/139799060122/theperfectas-fanfiction-learn-to-live-i

“I’m home!” Blueberry announced a few hours later, bursting in through the door, letting a few stray snowflakes in with him. Papyrus was sleeping on the couch, snoring softly, while Red sat on the floor beside it, idly playing with his magic and conjuring tiny little bones.

Before Red could answer, Sans stomped his feet to get the snow off of his boots before he walked over and stared disapprovingly at his brother.

“How long has he been sleeping?” Blue asked, putting a hand on his hip and pouting.

“Eh, not that long. An hour?”

“You could have woken him up,” Sans continued, but it was softly enough that it wouldn’t wake Papyrus. Red smirked and sent away some of the little bones he’d created.

“We talked for a while, figured I stressed him out. You really don’t like naps, do ya, Blueberry?”

“It wouldn’t be so bad if he didn’t take them almost every day.” Sans said with a sigh. He helped Red to his feet and moved away from the couch so they wouldn’t wake the snoring skeleton. “But… he’s always had problems with nightmares. I’m just glad he can get some sleep, at least.”

Red didn’t say anything, just looked at Papyrus and felt the good-hearted jealousy he always felt when either of them spoke so kindly of one another. It was nice that Blue thought about his brother like that.

“What’d you do to stress him out?” Sans asked, snapping Red out of his little thoughtful moment and back to the present.

“Oh, heh… heavy stuff, y’know. Chipping or whatever.”

Blueberry’s face fell. “Ah, I see. He’s been very worried about you,” Sans said softly. “Not to say I haven’t been concerned as well, but I think that hits closer to home for him than it does for me.”

Red looked away. “Uh, yeah… about that, he said we should… shit…” he broke off, rubbing the back of his neck with a frown.

Blue waited patiently, a curious look on his face.

“He said we should… y’know. Talk about what happened. Said it’d been bothering you, I figure it’s the least I can do, its fucking awful and uhm… yeah. So.” Red shifted awkwardly from where they both stood near the kitchen. He didn’t look at Sans’s face.
“I think that’s a good idea,” he said quietly, “but only if you’re comfortable with it.”

God it was so NOT comfortable it hurt, but Red shook his head anyways. “No, if you wanna talk about it, it’s cool. I’m, uh… sorry. Again.” He looked up. Sans’s eyes were big, but the shorter skeleton just gave a quick, decisive nod.

They both sat down at the chairs around the little table, and Sans pulled his up so they could sort of face each other, but not entirely. He looked a little more reserved than usual, but now that they were talking about it, Red realized there was a lot he wanted to say, but he waited patiently for Sans to say something.

“I… I know that what you did wasn’t right,” Sans said quietly, fingers playing idly with the bandana around his neck, “and I know that it isn’t something I can just forget about, but… I’ve talked to Papyrus, and I think I understand the reasoning behind it.” He looked up at Red, who was watching him in silence. “I asked you before to explain why you did it, do… do you think you could? Now that we’re friends?”

He wanted to protest the use of the word, but he didn’t. He gave a side-long glance over at Papyrus, who was still sleeping peacefully, and then looked at Sans again.

“You really sure you want me to? It’s pretty fucked up.”

“I’m sure. I’ve been thinking about it for quite some time.”

Red felt that familiar guilt in his stomach, but he swallowed it down. He looked at Blueberry, so open and trusting of somebody who’d hurt him so bad.

“I thought it didn’t matter,” Red explained, voice gentle and low. “I thought nothing mattered anymore. I saw you and you looked so damn happy and I hated you for it, I didn’t understand why the fuck you deserved to be so happy but I didn’t. I took it out on you. You were just another Sans I’d stumbled across who’d gotten the longer end of the stick and I’m a bitter asshole that I decided to make you as unhappy as I was.”

Red stopped, well aware that he’d spoken long after he’d meant to stop, but just like with Papyrus, he didn’t know how to deal with being listened to.

“It was wrong. I knew that when I did it but I still fucking did it, because I thought it didn’t matter and I honestly didn’t give a shit what happened to me or any other Sans.”

“So… so you still thought of me as you, in a way?” Sans asked.

“I guess so. It doesn’t really matter, though, I knew I was hurting you and I knew you wanted me to stop but I… I just…” Red let out a frustrated breath. “I fucked up. I wouldn’t blame you if you didn’t trust me, or if you still were afraid I might… fuck. Y’know. Do it again.”

“Would you?” Sans asked in a quiet monotone.

Red felt a burning, painful ache in his bones. “No. I’d fucking- no, I can’t even think about hurting you anymore. It’s so fucking stupid and I know I’m a pushover but… haha, I… I want to stay here? And if you can never really trust me, that’s okay, if… if I could go back I’d do it different, I wish I could, cause all of a sudden I care what you think about me and I want you to like me, and… shit. I’m rambling.” Red gave a nervous laugh as he rubbed his eye socket, not really thinking about the gesture but feeling the faint traces of pain.

Sans was looking down at his lap, quiet and thoughtful. After a short pause, he looked up.
“Did you know? That Papyrus would try to kill you?” he asked, barely more than a whisper.

Red blinked, unprepared for the question. He lowered his eyes.

“Yeah. I did.”

Blue paused again. His hands fell away from his bandana and he folded them in his lap instead.

“Can you do something for me?”

“Sure, yeah. Anything.”

“Can you promise you won’t try to get yourself killed anymore?” he asked, looking up with those big blue eyes with stars in them.

Red opened his mouth, closed it, and then looked at the floor.

“Red?”

“Why’d you tell him not to kill me?” Red blurted before he could think about it. “I deserved it- I still probably deserve it, so why the fuck did you stop him?”

“I-I… Red…” Sans began, reaching out a hand to steady the other Sans but not quite making it. Red was crying- he didn’t know why, but big, silent tears fell down his cheeks. Blueberry very slowly put his hands on Red’s shoulders, leaning forward to give him a gentle hug.

Red sniffled and held him for all he was worth.

“Why are you so good if I’m so fucking awful?” he sobbed, burying his head in Blueberry’s shoulder. “I don’t deserve a second chance- I don’t deserve you, or Papyrus, or any of this- so why’d you do it? Why’d you stop him?”

Blueberry’s hands were so very careful on his back, rubbing in little circles in a way that calmed Red down but made him cry all the harder. Eventually Blue pulled him away to look at him with those big wondrous eyes, steady hands on either shoulder.

“Because I knew you could be better. And I was right.”

Red let out a broken little sob, and Sans pulled him back into a hug. He was crying, too- not nearly as much and not nearly so loud, but his breath hitched sometimes, mostly when little whimpers escaped Red’s own mouth.

“Doing bad things doesn’t make you a bad person,” Sans whispered, still with his comforting hands on Red’s back, still so good and everything Red wasn’t. “I believe in you, Red. I know you can be just as great as I am- but you’ve never had anybody to be there for you. But I’m here now. I trust you- and I want you to stay here with us. I’m here for you.”

Red would’ve formed a coherent sentence, but he was a snotty, shivering mess and he didn’t know what to do with all these emotions, or how to express them, or how the fuck to stop crying. He was so confused, about everything, so he just held on to Sans and felt how warm he was, and he realized with a sudden urgency that he’d do anything to keep him safe.

“Thank you,” he choked out after a moment, but it was muffled in Sans’s bandana and his voice broke. “So fucking much- thank you-”
Sans held him and shushed him, and it felt so good to have somebody be there.

“You deserve this, Red. I’m so proud of you.”

Red didn’t say anything, just held Sans a little tighter and let himself cry.
check out this OTHER amazing fanart somebody drew, it warms my heart holy shit-->

i cry, even though i'm a filthy sin, when people draw me things i turn into pudding. thank you!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Muffet, you better have some good stuff cookin’ cause I’m hungry as hell.”

Red followed Sans and Papyrus into the restaurant, hands in his newly acquired red hoodie and eyes wide. The café was absolutely nothing like Grillby’s- as soon as the three of them walked in, the people inside turned and smiled at Papyrus, who lazily waved and returned the excited ‘hello’s!’ he received.

“Ah, Papy dearie, it’s been so long!”

Red turned to see a tall spider-monster holding various trays in her six hands. She gave a big, toothy smile to Papyrus, finishing up at the table before she hurried over and wrapped him up in a hug.

“Oh! And you brought Sans, too!” she cooed, and she moved down to Sans, who blushed, but allowed her to give him a big, six-armed hug before her five eyes finally fell on Red.

“And… oh! Papy, dear, who is this?”

“That’s Red- he’s our cousin from New Home,” Papyrus lied, cool and composed. He gave Red a little wink, and Red grinned at Muffet.

“Nice ta meet ya, ma’am,” he said, holding out a hand.

Muffet’s eyes lit up and she grabbed it with three of hers and gave it a quick shake before she pulled him in and gave him a hug too. Red felt his heart beat fast for a moment, but then he remembered that this wasn’t his timeline and he just smiled at her as she pulled away again.

“Oh, what a darling. The more skeletons the better, Papy dear eats more of my pastries than the rest of the town put together,” she said with a two-eyed wink, but then somebody called her name from further back in the restaurant and she flashed the group of three an apologetic smile.

“Come in! Come in, make yourselves at home, I’ll be with you in a moment, darlings.” And with that Muffet was hurrying away, grabbing dirty dishes with her many free hands. It was mesmerizing to watch- Red found himself idly smiling.

“Muffet’s super nice,” Sans said, nearly jumping as he grabbed Red’s shoulder, “and if you like Papy’s hot chocolate you’re going to love all of Muffet’s desserts- oh, brother, he can get more than one, right?”
Papyrus laughed as he led the two Sans’s over to a free table in the quaint little café. It was roomy enough for a general thrum of customers to give the place a warm and welcoming atmosphere, well-decorated with frilly things and spider-themed accessories. It was nothing like Red had ever seen.

“He can get as many as he wants, it’s on me today,” Papyrus said, sliding into one of the three booths that lined one of the walls. Red got in the other side, and Blueberry sat beside him. It was little and probably didn’t mean anything to either of the brothers, but it meant a whole lot to Red.

Muffet brought them drinks while they waited- well, she brought Sans a glass of water, and Papyrus a bottle of honey. She paused to look at Red, who gave her a shy smile.

“Hmm… condiments, or beverages?” she asked, looking between the two residents of Snowdin. “What would you like, dearie?”

“Uhm… do you have mustard?” Red asked sheepishly. His brother would always slap the bottle out of his hands, calling him disgusting for drinking it, but Muffet only laughed.

“Of course! I keep all of my condiments in stock, just in case some hungry skeleton stops by,” she said with a wink, and then she was off.

“Mustard!” Sans exclaimed when she was out of earshot. He gave Red a playful slap on the arm. “That’s so gross, Red!”

“Can it, jerk.” Red said, but he blushed.

They ate- everything was so good that Red ate until he couldn’t eat any more. It all turned to magic and he felt like his bones weighed a ton, but it was so worth it. He ate everything Blueberry told him to try, and everything he tried was delicious.

“We’ll have to go see Alphys sometime- you’d love her! She gives me warrior training, she’s the Captain of the Royal Guard, she’s so cool!” Sans went on, a half-eaten donut on his plate. “And her girlfriend Undyne is fun, too, she’s the Royal Scientist, so you can talk to her about all of your nerd stuff or whatever, she’s really nice.”

“Yeah, Red, you’ll have to meet them sometime. Al would love you, but she’ll probably ask you to teach her how you’re so good with your magic. She’s loud, obnoxious, and she breaks things a lot, but she can fix them better than they were before they got broke.”

Red nodded with a mouth full of chocolate mousse.

“And we’ll have to take you to see the Queen, too! It sounds like your King wasn’t so nice, but Toriel is a big fluffy pushover, I’m sure she’d love to meet you.”

“Really?” Red asked as he swallowed the dessert.

“Yeah! She likes to meet all of her subjects, and since you’re staying she’ll probably want to meet you, too. You’d like her- she really likes pie. One time, when I went with Alphys to the castle, she gave me a butterscotch-cinnamon pie to take home. It was really good, wasn’t it, Papy?”

“Yeah, she sure knows how to cook,” Papyrus said. He looked so content- like the soft murmurs and tinkling of silverware put him at ease. He looked at one of the walls and he frowned.

“Hey, bro, it’s almost two.”

“Shoot!” Sans said. He hopped out of his seat with surprising speed and stood by the table. “I’m
going to be late to my post! Oh, you two have fun, I’ll be home at six!” he chirped, and without much warning he leaned back over the booth and gently clacked his skull against Red’s, and then went and did the same to Papyrus.

Red blushed as Sans hurried out of the restaurant, waving goodbye to Muffet. Papyrus laughed at him and smiled.

“You’d better get used to it, Red, he does it all the time,” Papyrus said, and even though he was blushing, Red smiled a little at the taller monster.

He could definitely get used to it.

They hung out at Muffet’s for another hour or so before Red started to get antsy. He tried to hide it so he wouldn’t ruin Papyrus’s fun, but the ever-observant skeleton saw him shifting and watching the other patrons and he seemed to understand.

Papyrus paid and they left, and the familiar chill felt good after the warmth of the café. Muffet had given Red another hug before he left, and he was sort of jealous that he didn’t have six arms, because it seemed really useful. Imagine how many things he could punch at once, if he had six fists.

The two skeletons stood outside like a couple of loitering teenagers while Papyrus smoked. As predicted, Red had been given a thorough scolding for accepting Papyrus’s last cigarette, and so Blueberry had made Papyrus promise he wouldn’t give Red any more.

Papyrus passed one over, still, and Red gladly accepted it. Sans wouldn’t be home till six, so he’d just wash his clothes before then.

“So what’d ya think?” Papyrus asked, jerking his head back towards the building they leaned against. “Good, yeah?”

“That was the best fucking donut I’ve ever eaten,” Red said as he let out a smoky breath. Papyrus laughed.

“I was thinking if you wanted, I could ask her about getting you a job cleaning dishes or something. I know you’ve been asking about one, it isn’t like we’re gonna ask you to pay rent, but if you wanted something to do, y’know.”

Red was touched that Papyrus was actually thinking about it, but he just smirked. “Yeah, that’d be cool. I already do all of Blueberry’s at home, so.”

“He goes on and on about how much he appreciates you doing that, even when you’re sleeping. Kinda makes me feel guilty, man,” Papyrus joked with a lazy smile.

Red would’ve said something, but just then he heard a commotion going on over at the store. Papyrus picked up on it a moment later, flashed Red a worried look, and then the two of them hurried over across the square to where a group of monsters was gathering.

“Papyrus!” Catty exclaimed as the shopkeep saw the skeleton coming. The other monsters turned to look and that allowed Red to spot the one in the middle of the group- Snowdrake, looking winded and horror-stricken.

“What’s going on here? What happened?” Papyrus asked.
“H-he killed Childrake! W-w-we just… we didn’t do anything… I warned e-everybody I could-” Snowdrake babbled.

“Who?” Papyrus asked, but there was a dark edge to his voice.

“A skeleton! A big, mean looking skeleton, h-he just- killed him! Oh god, oh-“

Red grabbed Papyrus’s arm with enough force to do damage, but it seemed like the other monster had put two and two together as well.

Papyrus’s eyes went wide with terror and he looked at Red, who didn’t understand for a moment, until he looked out over the growing crowd and noticed who wasn’t among them.

“Sans is still out there,” Papyrus whispered just as Red realized it himself. His bones turned to ice.

Sans was still out there.

Chapter End Notes

oops i think you all knew this was going to happen
Sans’s arms were pinned above him to a tree, bones wedging his wrists together and above his head. He sobbed, but the awful monster before him was still kicking around his sentry station.

“Well, you may look like my brother, but you certainly aren’t,” the dark, awful Papyrus said. He wore armor, slick, black and red armor, and he had teeth like a sharks. He turned back to Blue, who he’d immobilized, and gave a deep frown. “So- where is my brother?”

Sans couldn’t say anything. It hurt, where the bones had scraped bone and Papyrus had roughly grabbed him to get him on the tree in the first place, but he couldn’t let this monster find Red. He sniffled but stayed quiet.

“Ah, I see. Playing the hero, are we?” Papyrus asked as he strode forward. He rested one of his hands against the tree and leaned in close enough to Sans for the little monster to feel his breaths against his face. “Tell me where my brother is, or you’re going to regret it.”

“I-Leave him alone,” Sans managed to stutter, but it was met with a sharp bone being slashed along his ribs.

He sucked in a breath to scream, pain lancing through his chest as the fabric of his uniform was slashes and the cold was let in, but the dark Papyrus grabbed his jaw and held it shut. He looked unmoved by any of it.

“None of that, now. I’m here for my brother, and if you tell me where he is, I’ll spare you. If not…” Papyrus’s sharpened bone-knife trailed along Sans’s exposed ribs, and Sans arched his back and hissed in pain. Papyrus let go of his jaw, but Sans just cried.

“Fine. I guess you like doing things the hard way,” Papyrus deadpanned. Sans opened his eyes just in time to see Papyrus’s knife being driven into the open socket.

Blueberry screamed. He struggled and cried and could hardly breathe because it hurt so much- bile rose in his throat and he was almost sick.

“Tell me where my weapon is,” Papyrus growled.

“S-stop, please, please-!”

Papyrus twisted the knife in the socket, driving it further into the strange matter inside of a skeleton’s skull. Sans shrieked and kicked, but if it did any damage to Papyrus the taller monster did nothing about it. He writhed and screamed and cried but Papyrus did nothing.

“Oh, you sound even better than him,” Papyrus said softly, drawing the knife away for a moment. “I trained him well, and now you think that he belongs to you. Well, now. Tell me where he is, or I will end you.”
"H-he… he isn’t…” Sans heaved, but when his answer wasn’t immediate the knife was replaced in his skull and he screamed for all he was worth. It hurt— it hurt so much that he could hardly think, or breathe, or do anything else but writhe and cry and hurt.

“Do you think he cares about you?” Papyrus began softly. “Do you think he is even capable of caring? He is a weapon. He turned himself into a weapon and he is mine. Do you understand?”

“He- he isn’t- he isn’t like y-you-“ Blueberry panted.

Papyrus’s face twisted. “So be it.”

Sans watched in numb horror as Papyrus brought his arm up, knife pointed at Sans’s skull.

“N-no- no, wait, please-“

“Die.”

Sans screamed. He shut his eyes as the knife came down, but before it could embed itself in his skull there was a flash of red and suddenly Papyrus was gone.

“I’ll kill you— I’ll fucking kill you, you piece of shit-“ he heard Red snarl with enough hatred in it to shake Sans to his Core.

“Bro- bro, it’s okay, we’re here-“ he heard his Papyrus say, and the bones were pulled from the tree and Sans collapsed into a sobbing heap. He felt familiar arms pick him up, but the sounds of a fight were all he could comprehend.

His right socket was numb and blind, but with his left he saw Red and the other Papyrus fighting like animals. He had never seen monsters fight like that- he watched with baited breath as Papyrus sent bones hurtling down towards Red’s skull, merciless and aiming to kill, but Red rolled out of the way just in time.

Snow flew up as Papyrus swept Red’s feet out from under him with a conjured bone, but as he fell Red blipped from existence and appeared again out of reach of the weapon.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Papyrus snarled, red magic crackling and flaring as he glared at his brother.

“If you touch him again I’ll fucking kill you,” Red growled in return, and it made Blueberry’s soul drop. Red was already panting, but his stance didn’t falter and his blue magic flared around him in waves and he launched himself back at Papyrus and they came together like lightning.

“Fuck- fuck-“ Papyrus breathed, holding his Sans close as the two foreign monsters battled.

“Papy he’s going to kill him- he’ll kill Red-“

Red managed to knock one of Papyrus’s feet out from under him with a kick, and he went in with a sharpened bone, but the other Papyrus was too quick- he ducked out of the way in time and caught Red in the back, sending him crashing to the ground with enough force to break his ribs.

“Stay down, you idiot,” Papyrus hissed, and just like that he sent bones flying and impaled Red to the ground. He struggled and writhed and spat, but the smaller skeleton was stuck by his ribs and pelvis.

“Did you really think you could beat me?” Papyrus asked, putting a foot on Sans’s chest and
stepping down. The sickening crunch of ribs snapping nearly made Blueberry ill. Papyrus’s grasp on him tightened as Red yelped.

“Fuck you- fuck you, I’ll fucking kill you-” Red’s threats were cut off as Papyrus broke another rib and he grunted in pain. Sans shouted something, maybe ‘stop,’ but it just made Red’s attacker turn towards the two of them.

“So, you care about these two, do you?” Papyrus said, stepping off of Red and towards the two skeleton’s shivering in the snow. “Well how about I give you the pleasure of watching them die?”

“No- no-” Red growled, but the venom was gone as he writhed and struggled to get free of the bones. “Stop- Don’t hurt them-“

“Behave and I won’t, brother,” Papyrus said, still staring at Blue and his own counterpart. “But disobey me again and they will be turned to dust.”

Red stopped struggling. His face turned, painfully so, and he stared at Blueberry.

“Red- fight back- please-“ Blue began to plead, but Red’s face twisted and he turned away again.

“I can’t let him hurt you,” Red said, so softly, but the forest was silent apart from his labored breathing. “I can’t- I-“

“Good boy,” Papyrus said, and he knelt down and brought a chain-link collar from his belt and without a pause he wrapped it around Red’s neck and pulled it tight. Red gasped and twisted, but then he caught Blue’s eyes and he only shivered in the snow.

“Fuck. God damn it-” Blue’s Papyrus growled as the other monster stood again and jerked the collar around Sans’s throat and made him yelp and writhe on the forest floor.

“Stop! You’re hurting him, stop it, please-“ Blue cried, struggling and getting free of the hands that held him, but a bone hit the floor at his feet and he stopped. Papyrus caught him again and held him close.

“Sans, we can’t, we can’t beat him-“

“Let me go! Papyrus let me go, he’ll kill Red, he’ll kill him-“

“Sans, please,” Papyrus whimpered, resting his head on Blue’s back. “We can’t fight him. He’ll kill all of us.”

“So, at least one of you has some sense,” the bad Papyrus sneered. He stood tall, holding the chain that was connected to Red, and he smiled.

“Don’t hurt him- stop- please-!” Sans shouted, still squirming and struggling and trying to shake Papyrus’s arms off of him. Red was on his knees, holding the collar and barely able to breathe. He was crying- both Sans’s were crying.

“Stop it, Blueberry,” Red sobbed. The noise made Papyrus grit his teeth and give the chain a rough tug that sent Red sprawling to the floor.


“B-Boss-“
“I said I would spare these two, nobody else. Do as I say or they will die.”

“Red no- no no no stop it, please stop-” Blueberry bawled, but Papyrus held him tight as the tall monster cried as well.

Red met his eyes, and for a second, the collared monster looked calm. Blue heard the quiet, deep breath he let out before he gathered up his magic and it sparked to life around him. He was going to shift- Sans screamed and twisted and tried to get him to stop, because it wasn’t worth it, but Red didn’t listen.

“What a good boy, Sans,” Papyrus said quietly, watching the monster at his feet.

“I’m sorry,” Red breathed. He was looking at the two brothers in the snow.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

second-to-last chapter everybody, short and sweet and to the point

It usually hurt- it almost always hurt to change from one form to another, but Red did it and all he felt was a deep-rooted sadness. Blue stopped struggling when it was over, and he was so glad for that- he wanted to scream at the stupid fucking idiot, that they’d never win against his Papyrus, that they were weak and had never fought for a damn thing in their lives.

He met Papyrus’s eyes- not the one that had him on a leash, but the other one. He was crying- it was the second time Red had seen him cry, but his arms held Sans back and he was so fucking happy that at least Papyrus understood.

“If I’d known it would be this easy, I would have sent you off to another timeline years ago,” Papyrus said like it was the easiest thing in the world. Red glared up at him, fully transformed, but he couldn’t do shit. Not when Sans and the good Papyrus were still right there, not when he’d watched Blueberry get his eye socket ripped apart and devastated.

“Red… Red, please, don’t let him- don’t do this, Red, p-please,” Blueberry sobbed, giving a weak little squirm, but Papyrus held him close.

“Red?” His Papyrus asked, pulling the chain taunt and smiling. “What an awful nickname.”

“Fuck you,” Papyrus said, tears still running down his usually-composed face. “You’re not gonna get away with this.”

“Oh? And who exactly is going to stop me? Surely not you two. Both level one, both soft and weak, it’s a shame really. Being another version of myself, you’ve got a lot of potential.” Papyrus sighed. “But, regardless. This timeline is mine, now.”

“You think we’re the only two here? Alphys and the Guard will stop you- so why don’t you go back to your own timeline and leave us the hell alone?” Papyrus growled, but it only made his counterpart laugh.

“Of course I know you’ve got a Guard, but they don’t have a weapon like mine, now do they? I assume the two of you know nothing about how powerful your little “Red” here really is.” Papyrus gave Red’s chain a little tug.

“Fight back- Red, please, don’t let him do this-“ Blueberry pleaded again. Red lifted his snout and looked at him and saw how big his eyes were.

“I didn’t think it was possible for somebody to be more pathetic than my Sans,” Papyrus remarked, looking at Blue with disdain. “Clearly, though, I was wrong.”

“Red please, you don’t deserve this, you can stop him, please-“

“You’d better get him to shut up, Sans, or the deal is off,” Papyrus hissed. “I will kill him.”
“Don’t be scared of him- you can do this- I believe in you, Red-""

“Shut him up, now, or I will kill him.”

But Blueberry was giving him that wide-eyed, starry stare. Red looked to the other Papyrus- and saw him looking at him in a way he’d never seen.

“All you have to do is try,” Papyrus said quietly. Time slowed down as he released Blueberry and suddenly he blipped out of existence.

Red reacted like lightning- he lunged forward and grabbed Papyrus’s femur in his maw and bit down on it with enough force to snap it in two. Papy appeared behind him a moment later and kicked him to the ground, and even as Red’s brother screamed in anger and tried to slash at Papy’s neck, the monster had already teleported away again.

The phantom pain in his eye socket was roaring to life, because he knew that if this failed, that’s what would happen. If this failed, he’d be punished, and the weeks he’d spent would mean nothing. But his Papyrus was on the ground beneath him and he couldn’t let him hurt Blue, or Papy, or anybody in this timeline. He finished ripping off his brother’s leg before he ran his claws along his ribs and bit down in the crook of his neck and collar. The splintering bones hurt his snout, but he didn’t care.

He wasn’t going to let Papyrus hurt them. He wasn’t going to be afraid of him any more. He heard the skeleton beneath him rage and thrash and try to dislodge himself from Red’s fangs, but it was useless. The weapon he’d used to murder others had turned on him, and he was powerless against it.

“Get off of me- you filthy animal, do you think you can be happy? You think this is going to solve anything? I’ll wake up back in our timeline and I’ll come back here and this time I won’t spare these two worthless-”

Red’s fangs loosened on Papyrus’s bones.

He heard both skeletons shout, but before they could stop him he took Papyrus's skull in his teeth and crushed it like an eggshell.
Red shifted back as Papyrus’s body turned to dust and all that was left was his red and black armor- the skeleton gritted his teeth at the sight of it before he kicked it away. 

"Red- Red-“ Blueberry gasped as he all but threw himself onto the bigger Sans. He was sobbing hysterically. “You’re okay- oh Red I thought- I thought he was going to-“

“Heh, chill out, I’m fine,” Red said, but Blueberry’s hands were already working on the collar that was still around his neck. In the next few seconds, it fell to the forest floor.

“What about your ribs- oh I shouldn’t have hugged you so hard, I’m so sorry Red, are you okay? Do you-“

“Jesus, Sans, I’m fine. I’ve had a lot worse,” Red said, giving him a reassuring smile. It didn’t quite reach his eyes.

Papyrus came over a moment later and kicked the collar away from the three of them.

“You did it, man,” Papyrus said. He pulled off his orange hoodie, leaving nothing but a black tank top underneath, and handed it to Sans. His jacket had gotten torn up and ripped when he’d changed, but luckily his shorts were still in-tact.

Red pulled it on, getting lost for a moment before Blue yanked it over his head and gave him a huge, watery grin.

“I-I knew you could do it,” Sans said happily, but then he caught sight of the armor and dust laying in the snow and he sucked in a deep breath and looked away.

“Sorry about that. Probably didn’t wanna see me kill him. You guys don’t do that kinda stuff here.”

“Don’t worry about it- it was a little fucked up but don’t worry about it.” Papyrus said. He was still crying a little, but he raised one of his hands up and wiped away the tears. “God damnit, Red.”

Blueberry hadn’t let him go yet, and soon Papyrus came and all three of them plopped down in the snow, keeping their distance from where the remains of Red’s brother were scattered, but the wind was already blowing the dust away. Red wrapped his arms around Blueberry, and Papyrus was big enough that he put both Sans’s in his lap and hugged the Sans-ball.

“What about your eye?” Red asked quietly, reaching up and laying a careful hand near Blue’s wounded socket. The bone had been scraped upwards and it was going to leave a scar, but Sans just shook his head.

“I’m fine- it’ll be fine. It doesn’t really hurt that much.”

“Don’t lie, shrimp,” Red warned, but Blueberry laughed and hugged him tighter, the laughter quickly turning into more crying.

“It’s fine, really! It’ll be fine, because your brother is gone, and you can stay here with us. So it’s fine.”
When the statement was met with silence, Sans pulled away and looked into Red’s eyes.

“Red?” Papyrus asked, but the skeleton pried himself away from the pile and the warmth and stood in the snow. He looked down at the remains of the monster he’d killed.

“I can’t stay here,” Red said quietly. It killed him to say it- he wanted to stay so bad. His voice shook.

“What?” Blueberry cried, jumping up from Papyrus’s lap and grabbing Red’s arm. “R-Red, that isn’t funny, of course you can-”

“He nearly killed you,” Red said, and Blue’s protests died in his throat as the small monster desperately searched for something to say.

“Red, don’t be an idiot, if he comes back we’ll know, and we can be prepared, and-“

“You heard him. Next time he’ll go after you guys,” Red cut Papyrus off. The tall skeleton had risen from the floor, but he didn’t move closer as he looked into Red’s eyes.

“I have to go back.”

“No- no no no Red, please, you can’t leave, y-you can’t-“

“I’m sorry,” Red said quietly. He couldn’t look at either of them.

Sans hugged him, and Red couldn’t stand it- he hugged him back twice as hard and soon he found himself crying as well.

“I want to stay so fucking much- but if he comes back and he hurts you, what the fuck am I going to do? I can kill him again and again but he’ll keep coming back, because he’s a fucking asshole.”

“You don’t have to go- please, just stay here, p-please Red-“

Papyrus put a hand on his brother’s shoulder, and it made Blue shut up and pull away to stare up at the bigger monster.

“P-Papy?”

“It’s his choice, bro,” Papyrus said quietly. He looked at Red. “But he’s right. If he stays, he’s going to have to keep killing his bro until eventually his bro kills one of us.”

“But he’s dead!”

“If it’s in another timeline it doesn’t matter,” Red explained softly. “He just got sent back to our timeline.”

“But- but if he’s there, you can’t go back, he’ll-“

“Heh, you think I’m gonna let that asshole pick on me again?” Red asked, doing his best to put on a smile. He put his hand on Sans’s shoulder and grinned. “He might be able to beat me up on two legs, but I can take him any day on four. I’ll be fine, Blueberry. I promise.”

Sans was sobbing, but he didn’t try to argue further. Papyrus hugged Red, and it was so bittersweet that it hurt.

“Thanks for saving him, Red,” Papyrus whispered. “I knew you had it in you.”
Papyrus was crying. It was weird to see any Papyrus cry, but Red just gave him a little squeeze and huffed. He pulled away and looked at the two of them, standing beside each other. He knew that if he stayed any longer, he’d never leave.

“Guess this is goodbye, huh,” he said, but his smile faltered and he looked at the snow on the ground. “Thanks again for not killing me, and, uh… everything else.”

“Will we see you again?” Sans sobbed. Papyrus put an arm around his shoulder and pulled him closer, but he wasn’t much better off.

Red shrugged. “Probably. If things ever get settled down in my timeline I’ll come looking. Shouldn’t be too hard to find ya again, if my idiot brother managed to do it.”

He was lying. Papyrus knew it, because he looked away, but Red was a good liar. He had no idea if they’d ever see each other again, but he knew one thing: he was pretty fucking determined to keep them out of harms way. If that meant getting out of their lives and never coming back, then whatever.

Sans reached up and messed with his scarf, and Red didn’t understand until he moved forward and wrapped it around Red’s neck.

“Y-You can keep it. So you remember us.”

Red’s breath hitched, but the smile he gave Sans was genuine. “You think I’d forget you, you stupid fucking blueberry?” he asked, but his voice broke a little and he reached his hand up to hold the fabric of the scarf.

“Now you’ve got a little bit of both of us,” Papyrus said. He was standing a few paces back, with his hands shoved in the pockets of his cargo shorts. “It’s definitely a step up from the edgy black and red crap you had on when you came here.”

“Shut up, asshole,” Red threatened. He was smiling- he was also crying.

“Promise you’ll be okay,” Sans said with sudden intensity. “P-Promise you won’t let him hurt you.”

“You worry too much.”

“Red, please-“

“I promise. Seriously, he isn’t gonna touch a hair on my head.”

Papyrus laughed, more like a sob, but he stepped forward and gave Red an affectionate pat on the skull. “That was an awful joke.”

Red smiled, but he didn’t say anything. He couldn’t keep doing this. He took a step back from them, and once more they moved together almost like it was second nature and they stared at him. He wanted that- to be that close to somebody. For a second he found himself thinking that he could have that here, but a glance at the armor on the snow reminded him that it wouldn’t last.

“I’ll see you guys later,” Red murmured. Sans’s face twisted and he rested it against Papyrus’s ribs, but he continued to watch as Red gathered up his magic- and a little something else he didn’t know he had- and the snow was suddenly cast in blue.

He looked at Sans and those big, big eyes with stars in them. He wondered if his eyes could be like that.
For a second everything went still and even the falling snow seemed to stop.

When the moment passed, Red was gone.

Chapter End Notes

stay tuned for a short epilogue
this is the last chapter, so thank you to everybody who has read and supported this! It was rocky from the beginning but you guys are the real MVPs, like hot damn I didn't expect half as many of ANYTHING that this got (lookin at you fanart-ers... you guys warm my heart-places)

anyways yeah, epilogue, enjoy!

The snow fell peacefully outside. Red let out a breath and watched it puff out in the air. He stood outside of his house. The dust of his brother was still settling in that awful monster’s bedroom, but he’d deal with that later. He put a hand on the blue scarf around his neck before he set out for the forest.

He knew the day well- when things reset, it always went back to this day. He’d been sure to kill his brother as soon as he could. Quietly, even painlessly, although Papyrus hadn’t deserved for it to be that way. Still, it felt right. Blueberry would’ve liked it better than crushing his skull.

Red found himself saying that a lot, even though he’d only been back in his own timeline for a few hours. What would Blueberry do? What would Papy do? He still smirked at the lame nickname, but then he’d put his hands in the orange hoodie that smelled like cigarettes and think, nah, maybe it wasn’t so lame.

Nobody bothered him. Few monsters were out in the forest this early, and even fewer that would mess with one of the skeletons. The town didn’t know that Papyrus was dead yet- he’d probably just let them figure it out for themselves. He walked along the well-trodden path he took on sentry duties and eventually he came to his post.

It was so weird. He’d just been here- but the snow was undisturbed and everything was silent. There was no dust in the snow, or armor, just quiet. Red like the quiet.

He kept going until he could see the door that led from the Ruins. He was just in time, too- in the small clearing stood a tiny little human.

He’d never paid them much attention before. He knew they were the anomaly, but he’d never understood why they were resetting, or dying so much. But as he watched them walk, shy and nervous and scared, he understood. They stepped carefully over a branch in their path. Sans sort of wanted to snap it, but they’d been so careful, and they looked so damn scared. Their clothes looked a little singed around the edges- Toriel, probably.

They made it to the little bridge Papyrus had made, and they stopped. Maybe in another timeline, they could’ve gotten by, but the bridge was blocked with barbed wire. The human looked around, but when they realized there was no other way to cross, they turned back around.

When they saw Red standing in the middle of the path only a few steps behind them, they let out a strangled cry and fell backwards, flat on their ass.
“Don’t hurt me,” they signed uncertainly, like Red wouldn’t understand. He held up his hands but smiled.

“I’m not gonna hurt ya, kid. Sorry for scarin’ ya, though. I thought your reaction would be a little more humerus.”

Red offered his hand, and the human trembled and flinched. It took them a moment, but eventually they looked up again and saw that Red’s hand hadn’t moved. They gave him a big-eyed stare— it reminded him of Blueberry.

They reached up and took his hand, and he pulled them gently to their feet. He smiled at them and helped dust off some of the snow that had settled on their shoulders.

“Sorry you’ve had it so rough out here, kiddo. I bet my bro was one of the ones who gave you a lot of hell— you know him?”

They nodded with big, scared eyes.

“Don’t worry about that asshole anymore. He was a real jerk to me, too, but he’s gone now. I shoulda helped you sooner, it took me a while to figure out that you’ve only been resetting because of how damn awful it is underground.”

They looked away with guilt in all of their features. Red smiled and put a gentle hand on their shoulder.

“Hey, don’t worry about it, if I fell down here and kept getting killed I’d do the same thing. What’s your name, kid?”

“Frisk,” they signed cautiously.

“Frisk, huh? That’s a pretty weird name. I like it,” Sans said. Frisk looked away, but when they looked back again their eyes weren’t quite so scared.

“You aren’t going to hurt me?”

“Nah, I’ve been thinking a lot about it, and I think I’m gonna try to keep you safe,” Red said, and there they were— stars. He felt warmth blossom in his chest. “If you want to suffer through my awful jokes, that is.”

Frisk nodded, and before Red could do much else they’d moved forward and wrapped their arms around his chest. He felt them sob more than he heard them.

“Aww… don’t cry, kid, you’ll be okay.”

They held him for a moment longer before they pulled away, a gentle smile on their teary face as they brought their hands up.

“What’s your name?”

“Call me Red,” he replied, ruffling their hair.
Snow was falling. Red held out his hand and let a piece drift onto it before he blew it away again. His father caught his attention and began to sign.

“Are you sure this is the correct timeline?”

“Pretty sure. They all look kinda the same.”

“That is why I asked,” Gaster signed with a frightened look. It’d been a few years and Red had forgotten just how skittish his father was. After the human had returned to the surface and the resets had ended, he and Gaster worked together to get back to where Red had gone before.

It was actually Papyrus’s dust that had been the biggest help in finding the specific instance of the specific timeline that the two were searching for. It was the only defining thing that separated it from all other timelines- with the machine they’d worked together to fix, they’d dug through thousands of timelines before they’d found one that had the ‘code’ for Papyrus’s remains in it.

Any other timeline would have sufficed, but Red wanted this one. Gaster hadn’t argued with him, because his father had been conditioned not to argue. Before, that turned Red’s stomach, but now it just made him sad. Asgore had really done a number on the older skeleton.

“Perhaps you should have come alone,” Gaster went on. “They do not know me, I do not want to-”

“None of that, dad,” Red said with a sigh. “They’ll love you. I talked about you while I was here before, they probably remember.”

Red walked on. He knew the forest well- it was pretty much an exact copy of the one in his native timeline. It didn’t take long to find the post near the Ruins- there was nobody there, but he knew it was the right one. One of the trees nearby was splintered where bones had once been lodged in.

“Yup, this is the one.”

Gaster still held himself like the nervous wreck he was. Red truly did feel pity for his father. It wasn’t like Gaster was significantly older than Red was, anyways. Asgore had forced Gaster to try making artificial life from human souls, and Red and Papyrus had been the disappointingly normal result.

“Well, I guess we can either take a break here or go look for them in town. Seems like this timeline is ‘safe’ and no anomaly is gonna come- ever. That’s good for us.”

“Yes. Perhaps we should rest,” Gaster signed. Red saw that his legs were shaking and felt a pang of
guilt that he didn’t notice sooner.

“Come on, dad, you can sit at the sentry post,” Red offered, leading the way to the wooden box that functioned as a chair. The inside of it was fresh and pristine- Blueberry must’ve still been working as a sentry.

Gaster sat with only a few moments hesitation. It’d been a couple years since the human had killed Asgore and made it back to the Surface- ensuring that no more resets would occur. Still, Gaster’s condition was slow to improve, mostly because of his lack of confidence and his fear.

“We’ll rest here. Man, once Blueberry finds out that you’re not at 100% he’s gonna baby you. He’s a real worry-wart.”

“I apologize for keeping you from your friends,” Gaster signed.

Sans shook his head and laughed. “Come on, man, I’m a little nervous. Plus it isn’t your fault Asgore treated you like shit. We’ll go whenever you’re-”

Red stopped when he heard footfalls coming near, but soon after he turned to find the source, they stopped, too.

It was Blueberry.

The two Sanses stared at each other for a moment. The other stood in the middle of the path with a dumbfounded expression on his face. Red knew it was Blueberry- his Blueberry- because of the small scar that decorated his eye socket. The light in that eye was out- was he blind in it? - but as soon as he seemed to realize what he was looking at, his right one lit up enough to compensate.

“RED!” he shouted before he sprinted at him. Red met him halfway and Sans hugged him for all he was worth- his ribs bent and creaked from the force, but god damnit, he’d waited so long for this, and he hugged Sans back just as hard.

“Hey, Blueberry,” Red said, but his voice wavered and his tough guy act fell away.

“Red! Oh my gosh, oh my- Red, I thought- oh- I thought you- I thought I’d never see you again!” Blueberry cried, pulling himself away from the other Sans to look at him.

Red reached out a hand and ran it softly along Sans’s eye socket. “Shit, man, he really did a number on you.”

“I’m blind! Papy says it makes me look like a pirate- Alphys just says it makes me look cool. But who cares about that! You’re back!”

“Haha, it took me and dad a while, but we found a way,” he said. Blueberry still had a tight grip on him, but Red jerked his head to motion to Gaster.

“This is Gaster? Your father?” Blueberry asked, pulling away to look at the man who had risen from the sentry station and was standing nearby.

“Yes- after I got my timeline all straightened out, we worked on finding this one again. We both weren’t real big fans of where we came from.”

“And- and Papyrus?” Blueberry asked. “He didn’t hurt you-”

“I killed him- don’t worry about that, I haven’t seen his ugly mug in years.”
Blueberry had tears running down his cheeks, but he hurried over to Gaster and held out his hand. “Hello! I’m Sans- oh, well, you probably already knew that, but it’s very nice to meet you!”

“It is… nice to meet you, as well,” Gaster signed hesitantly. He shook Sans’s hand and the much shorter skeleton grinned.

“Oh my gosh- you’re even taller than Papy- Oh my GOSH- Papyrus! He’s still at home, we’ll have to go back right away, he’ll want to see you and hug you and he’ll probably cry a lot.”

“You’re cryin’ a lot right now, Blueberry,” Red remarked.

“So are you! Oh- I’m so glad you’re back!” Blueberry exclaimed before he hurled himself into another hug. Red was more than happy to return it.

“Come on! Oh, he’ll be so happy to see you- and Dr. Gaster, you’re more than welcome to stay with us as well!” Sans said, hurrying over, seemingly confused as to what to do with all of his excitement. He took one of Gaster’s hands. “And if you wanted to, I’m sure Undyne would love you to work with her at the lab! She’s very very nice, I promise. But we’ll worry about that later!”

Red laughed, somewhere between an actual laugh and a sob. He’d spent months telling himself he’d act so cool when he finally got back, and here he was blubbering like an idiot.

“Papy! Papy come here RIGHT NOW!” Sans shouted as soon as they made it to the door of the house. He’d forced Gaster to stop and rest once Red had told him that he was still recovering. The older monster was slow to trust anybody, but he seemed to take an immediate liking to this timeline’s Sans.

“Papyrus! Come oooooon! We’ve got a Code Red!”

Red snorted, and to his surprise and pleasure, Gaster cracked a smile as well. Blue hauled them inside and shut the door behind them before he scrambled over to the stairs.

“Papyrus you lazybones, get down here! This is non-negotiable!”

“Jesus Christ, Sans, if it’s another Napstablook thing I’m gonna-” Papyrus mumbled as he appeared in the stairway. It took him all of two seconds to spot Red near the door.

He teleported- Red hadn’t been expecting it, but Papyrus teleported over and scooped him up into an embrace. Literally. Red’s feet dangled a Papyrus hugged him to his chest like a teddy bear.

“Fuck- I thought he was talkin’ about something else- Code Red-” Papyrus laughed as he buried his head in Red’s hoodie. “You’re back! Fuckin’ hell, Red, it’s been four years- and this is your dad, right?” Papyrus asked as he deposited Red back on the floor and looked at the other, taller skeleton standing uncertainly nearby.

“This is Gaster, he’s my dad,” Red remarked lamely as his emotions overwhelmed him and he gave Papyrus another hug, which the taller skeleton returned in full. God, he’d missed them.

Papyrus moved forward and hugged Gaster as well- the latter seemed a little shocked, but it was a short embrace and he didn’t have much time to process it.
“Heh heh, sorry, sir, I’m just… oh my god Red’s back!” Papyrus said, once again picking him up and hugging him. Sans joined in for a moment as well.

“That’s what I said!”

“And this time you aren’t leaving- I’m not gonna let you leave- ya hear me, you one-night stand motherfucker?” Papyrus pulled Red away and gave him a watery smile. “You’re both staying with us forever- so help me god-“

“Papy!” Sans scolded, but Red was laughing.

“We weren’t plannin’ on leavin again- we couldn’t really bring luggage, though, hope you don’t mind that we’re kinda homeless…”

“Homeless?” Papy said, wiping the tears from his face. “You’re standing in your house right now, you stupid shit. No offense, Dr. Gaster,” he added.

“None taken.”

“God, Red- you’re back- I didn’t think you’d actually make it. But I’m so glad you did, oh my god, Sans, we’re gonna have to get, like, five additions on the house-”

“And we’ll have to renovate the lab for Dr. Gaster!”

“Fuck, you’re right, and we’ll have to get two more beds. Shit, we have money, right? You’re the one who does that tax bullshit.”

“Who cares if we have money! We’ll make more!”

“Wait, what, do we actually not have money?” Papyrus asked.

“No, we do!”

Red laughed. Gaster, although confused, seemed at ease.

Red told them about Frisk- how funny the kid was, and how he’d helped them get back to the surface. Sans and Papyrus told him that nothing much had happened since he’d left four years ago, but they had loads of questions for Red and Gaster.

Red was genuinely surprised they still remembered so much of what happened. He was happy that they were just as happy to see him as he was to see them. He knew that leaving his timeline was the best thing he and his father could do, and where better to go than back to where Red's life had changed?

The eldest skeleton was the first to nod off. He fell asleep on the floor- he must’ve been wiped out from the day’s journey. Papy dropped off just a while later, spread-eagled on the couch.

“Jesus, he’s as lazy as always,” Red said. He and Sans had their backs against the couch, keeping their voices soft so they wouldn’t wake the others. “I’m offended- figured he’d be so excited to see me he’d want to stay up all night talking.”

“He got so excited he tired himself out,” Sans said with a giggle. “It’s been a long time since he’s been this excited about anything.”
“Heh, me too,” Red said softly. He leaned his head back and stared at the ceiling.

“Red?”

“Sup?”

“I really am happy that you’re back. When you came here- the first time- it… it really meant a lot to me. And you just… you just look so much better! And I’m so proud… gosh, I’m sorry,” Blueberry said with a soft little laugh. "I really missed you, Red."

Red felt that familiar, long-lost warmth in his chest. He looked over at his counterpart and smiled. Big, beautiful stars.

“I missed you too, Blueberry,” he said.

Sans leaned over and pressed his teeth to Red’s skull. Red returned the skeleton kiss, but laughed.

“You could at least take me out to dinner first, brat.”

Sans huffed and shoved him, but he was grinning. They sat close enough together that they could feel one another’s warmth. Papyrus stirred on the couch behind them, but the house was quiet and dim and it felt like the two skeletons were the only people in the whole world.

Red smiled.

He was home.

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